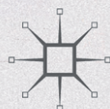


# JANE AUSTEN THE READER THE ARTIST AS CRITIC



OLIVIA MURPHY



## Jane Austen the Reader

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## The Artist as Critic

Olivia Murphy

palgrave  
macmillan



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I am obliged to Richard Knight for permission to include images from the Knight Collection's Godmersham Catalogue, housed at Chawton House Library. The cover image is reproduced courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

The first inklings of this book formed under the kind and encouraging supervision of Professor Kathryn Sutherland. I have endeavoured to make clear where ideas expressed in this book were originally hers – all of my arguments have been polished and strengthened by her careful criticisms of its drafts. Professors William Christie, Jocelyn Harris, Margaret Harris and Gordon McMullan, and Drs Gillian Dow, Freya Johnson and Tiffany Donnelly each gave expert advice on the work in progress and delivered it from many faults – those that remain are mine alone. Paula Kennedy and Ben Doyle at Palgrave were compassionately patient with a neophyte author.

I would not have begun, let alone completed this book, without the support of my partner Kathryn Wood, and my father Jim Murphy. It was my mother Janine Murphy who first introduced me to Jane Austen, and this book is dedicated to her memory.

# List of Abbreviations

- E* Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- L* *Jane Austen's Letters*, 4th edn, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford University Press, 2011)
- MP* Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1813), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- MW* Jane Austen, *Minor Works*, ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- NA* Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- P* Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- PP* Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Recess* Sophia Lee, *The Recess: or A Tale of Other Times* (1783–85), 3 vols facsimile, foreword J. M. S. Tompkins, intro. Devendra P. Varma (New York: Arno Press, 1972)
- SS* Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C. Southam (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- TL* [James Austen] *The Loiterer, a Periodical Work, First Published at Oxford in the Years 1789 and 1790* (Dublin: William Porter, 1792)

# Introduction

I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading  
– Jane Austen, *PP*, 55

‘Mischievous reading’, as one moralist wrote at the turn of the nineteenth century, ‘is worse than unsophisticated ignorance.’<sup>1</sup> This book is about one of English literature’s most mischievous readers, a reader who was also (and not coincidentally) one of its greatest writers. How did Jane Austen come to write six novels that are still widely regarded as some of the highest achievements of the genre? The answer lies in understanding what Austen read, and how she read it.

*Jane Austen the Reader* shows how the books Austen read – and, moreover, the critical way in which she read them – influenced her writing, and her innovations in literary realism. Austen’s role as a critical reader has long been overlooked, but her contribution to the development of literary criticism is as significant as her contribution to the development of the novel as a genre. In fact, the two are intertwined. Austen’s criticism of novelistic conventions, of individual works and of abstract – often hostile – commentary on the genre as a whole inspired her writing, from juvenile squibs to polished masterpieces. By reading Austen’s novels for their literary criticism, as much as for their creativity, we can gain new insights into her artistic practices. We can also learn to read all kinds of literature in new ways, by reading with Austen. As Terry Eagleton has written, ‘criticism is not an innocent discipline, and never has been’.<sup>2</sup> Austen’s disruptive, even dangerous criticism reveals her reading material in a new light, one that is rarely flattering to the established institutions of her time, or the placid assumptions of our own.

Most of the books Austen read have fallen out of fashion, if not out of print. Aside from specialists in the field, few living people have read, or would even *want* to read, the novels of Austen’s contemporaries and competitors. Acknowledging this, I have attempted where possible to give sufficient details of character or context to make my argument clear; more basic information is readily available online. I have tried, however, to retain enough quotations to convey the impressions of Austen’s reading, and the frequently hilarious experience (whether intended by the author or otherwise) of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century reader. The book’s many epigraphs I hope will act, therefore, as a sort of twenty-first-century commonplace book, mining a few of the ‘beauties’ of this literary period for the delight of the non-specialist.

That Austen was a writer steeped in the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has long been recognised by scholars as diverse

as Marilyn Butler, Jocelyn Harris, Claudia L. Johnson and Margaret Kirkham. The assertion that Austen's reading and her writing are closely linked has become a critical commonplace, and has arguably promoted the rediscovery and reprinting of works by contemporaries such as Elizabeth Inchbald, Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith. Yet the nature of the relationship between Austen's reading and her novels remains both unclear and unexplained, and each new identification of Austen's allusive practice seems to beg the same question: why, if Austen's writing is so firmly grounded in the literature of her contemporaries, is her own work so strikingly and consistently different?

*Jane Austen the Reader* seeks to answer this question by exploring the relationship between Austen's fiction and the wide range of works that can be seen as the inspiration – or provocation – for her novels. What this shows is that it was not only as a passive consumer seeking entertainment, nor as a writer, searching for ideas, that Austen engaged with literature, but as a critical reader: interrogating and evaluating the literature of her day, and articulating through her own novels her vision of that evolving form.

# 1

## ‘From Reading to Writing It Is But One Step’: Jane Austen, Criticism and the Novel in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,  
But are not critics to their judgment too?

– Alexander Pope

The Critick's judgment may be right, or it may be wrong; his taste good or bad: there is no greater probability, that an unknown person, who gives his opinion upon books once a month, or once a quarter, should be right, than that any other unknown person should be so, who delivers his in a parlour

– Anna Laetitia Barbauld<sup>2</sup>

Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? ... Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body.

(NA, 37)

Frances Burney's hugely successful first novel *Evelina* (1778) opens with an anonymous, ironic appeal to 'the authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews', for 'protection', addressing them as 'Magistrates of the press, and Censors for the Public' – 'those who publicly profess themselves Inspectors of all literary performances'.<sup>3</sup> In a book published 40 years later, the narrator of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is still voicing objections to the reviewers' treatment of novels. *Evelina's* mocking dedication to its reviewers and the dismissive account of their successors in *Northanger Abbey's*

polemic provide us with synecdochic evidence of the ongoing conflict between novelists and reviewers, and the 'threadbare strains' in which the quarrel was conducted.

At the heart of this dispute was the issue of the novel's status – as a literary genre; as a transmitter of virtue or immorality; and as a repository and refractor of cultural anxieties – a dispute that was played out not only in the reviews or in the first extended attempts at novelistic criticism, but also on the pages of novels themselves and, ultimately, in the minds of novel writers and readers. Mikhail Bakhtin has warned that

The study of the novel as a genre is distinguished by peculiar difficulties. This is due to the unique nature of the object itself: the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted. The forces that define it as a genre are at work before our very eyes: the birth and development of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the historical day.<sup>4</sup>

Exploring the early reception of novels is crucial to understanding the genre. The processes of creation and criticism are, in this period, inextricably linked, and while the relationship between author and reviewer, or novel and novelistic criticism, continued to be a troubled one throughout the period of the novel's development in the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, it was a relationship that was nevertheless enduring and indissoluble.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the development of the novel as a genre was complemented and – as I shall argue throughout this book – influenced by the inception and development of criticism of the novel. During this period criticism, whether explicit or implicit, emerges in a number of printed sources. Reviews and periodicals, along with prefaces and collections of novels, inform and support each other. Each of them performs the dual tasks that occupy critics of the novel: identification (what is a novel?) and evaluation (what is a good novel?). The first project, of identification, or definition, contributes to the stabilisation of the novel as a genre leading into the nineteenth century, while the second project of evaluation initiates the approval and canonisation of some novels and the relegation of others to comparative critical and historical oblivion. This process is remarkably deliberate on the part of eighteenth-century critics and also evinces a surprising degree of concordance between different writers in different formats and in different decades.

The 'Monthly and Critical Reviews' named by Burney were, until the nineteenth century, the two most important organs in Britain for the record and assessment of contemporary publications, both fiction and non-fiction. The *Monthly*, the most successful eighteenth-century review, achieved a

circulation of 5000 copies in the 1790s.<sup>5</sup> Despite the obvious antagonism towards the reviewers evinced by Burney and many of her fellow novelists, the reviews' readers generally commended their judgment and impartiality. Derek Roper quotes the 'Whig Johnson', Samuel Parr:

There is no one Review in this country, but what is conducted with a considerable degree of ability; and though I decline the task of deciding upon their comparative excellence, I have no hesitation in saying that all of them deserve encouragement from learned men. They much oftener assist than retard the circulation of good books – they rarely prostitute commendation upon such as are notoriously bad.

The principal attribute distinguishing the reviews of the eighteenth century from nineteenth-century publications like *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly* was their attempt to review, or at least take notice of, every new publication. As Roper writes, this was the result of a fundamentally different ethos held by the earlier reviews, one that was itself typical of Enlightenment philosophy:

Superficial comparisons with later Reviews tend to obscure the real character of these eighteenth-century journals. Numbers of the *Monthly* and the *Critical* were not meant to be read for entertainment and thrown away. They were conceived as instalments of a continuous encyclopaedia, recording the advance of knowledge in every field of human enterprise ... All the researches, speculations, discoveries, and achievements of that age of progress were recorded in these journals by means of a systematic review of as many new publications as possible – ideally, of all. To comment on the latest poems and novels was a small part of the reviewer's task.<sup>6</sup>

Although reviewers often complained about the magnitude and tedium of their assignments, the reviews' attempt to provide notice of all publications had important benefits for women novelists, and for the novel as a genre. As Laura Runge points out,

Like every other author whose books were sold to the public, female novelists saw their works reviewed by comprehensive journals that strove for both objectivity and universal coverage. The comprehensive project obliged reviewers to criticize novels by women however their own literary tastes or gendered ideologies might operate; so despite cultural imperatives for gallant condescension to women or assumptions about the catastrophic effects of novel reading, reviewers were bound to assess novels by women.<sup>7</sup>

It may be necessary to point out that most novels of the period, particularly first novels, were published anonymously, so identifying the sex of an author is no simple task. Nevertheless, studies do bear out the large number of women writers.<sup>8</sup> 'Significantly,' Runge adds, 'the number of novels by women increased at the same time that book reviewing became widespread,' and that fact alone suggests that any 'abuse' meted out by critics was unlikely to stanch the flow of literary 'effusions of fancy'.<sup>9</sup>

Not all of the fiction consumed by the eighteenth-century reading public was reviewed, however, or even named in the 'Catalogues' in which many novels were mentioned with only a brief description, or with no description at all. Robert Mayo points out that 'there is a considerable repository of prose fiction which seldom figured in the publishers' lists and which was rarely mentioned in the reviews, but which nevertheless enjoyed a wide currency': that is, the fiction (usually short 'tales' and 'histories') that was published in periodicals and magazines. Mayo writes that fiction 'of some sort was found in four hundred and seventy different periodicals published between 1740 and 1815'.<sup>10</sup> That Austen, like many among her contemporaries, read and responded to these stories, some of which were contributed by amateurs, and some by novelists as well established as Tobias Smollett, is confirmed by Edward Copeland in his study 'Money Talks: Jane Austen and the *Lady's Magazine*'. Copeland notes echoes of fiction published in the *Lady's* – appropriated names, and even elements of plot – in Austen's juvenilia and in *Sense and Sensibility*.<sup>11</sup>

The literary culture of the late eighteenth century was made up of amateurs and professionals, contributing as both readers and writers in a number of genres and formats. In some cases the work of amateurs was regarded above that of the 'hacks' – Smollett's character Tim Cropdale 'had made shift to live many years by writing novels, at the rate of five pounds a volume; but that branch of business is now engrossed by female authors'. These women, Smollett continues, 'publish merely for the propagation of virtue, with so much ease and spirit, and delicacy ... that the reader is not only enchanted by their genius, but reformed by their morality'.<sup>12</sup> While a young fellow at St John's College, Oxford, Austen's brother James created *The Loiterer*, a weekly periodical conceived along the lines of Johnson's *Idler*, which was sustained through 60 issues, beginning in 1789 and ending in March 1790. In his first paper, the eponymous Loiterer – employing the editorial plural – offers an account of the reciprocity of contemporary literary practices:

But if from reading to writing it is but one step, from writing to publishing it is less – and finding in course of time our works swell upon our hands, after a decent struggle between fear and vanity, we at length agreed that to keep our talent any longer wrapt in the napkin would be equal injustice to our writings, the world, and ourselves. (*TL*, 4)

Like Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler*, or *The Spectator* of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Loiterer* employed a number of different narratorial voices, moved between the epistolary and the essay mode, and included contributions by different authors. Most of the issues offer little more than a tired pastiche of Johnsonian moralising, although those which contain 'a rough, but not entirely inaccurate sketch of the character, the manners, and the amusements of Oxford, at the close of the eighteenth century' evince greater originality and interest, and – along with the contemporary rage for periodicals – justify *The Loiterer's* wide distribution and its early (pirated) reprinting in volume form (TL, 367). The 17-year-old Henry Austen, at the time a student at St John's, contributed several essays to what may have been developed as a joint enterprise by the two brothers, and there were contributions from other members of the college and the university. Some of the contributors were not identified, and remain anonymous.

The true identity of the contributor to the ninth issue remains indeterminate. *The Loiterer* for Saturday, 28 March 1789 begins with a facetious apology on the part of the editors for their 'past neglect' of the 'fair sex', before printing a letter from 'Sophia Sentiment', a young lady well read in both novelistic and periodical fiction. Sophia declares herself – using a label Elizabeth Bennet will later disclaim – to be 'a great reader'; explaining that besides 'some hundred volumes of novels and plays', she has, 'in the last two summers, actually got through all the entertaining papers of our most celebrated periodical writers, from the Tatler and Spectator to the Microcosm and the Olla Podrida. Indeed,' Sophia continues, 'I love a periodical work beyond any thing, especially those in which one meets with a great many stories, and where the papers are not too long' (TL, 50). Sophia declares *The Loiterer* 'the stupidest work of the kind I ever saw', because in eight issues she has found 'not one sentimental story about love and honour, and all that'. She complains that 'not even an allegory or dream have yet made their appearance in the Loiterer' (TL, 51). Sophia offers a number of suggestive possibilities for fiction to spice up the periodical, in the hope of seeing

some nice affecting stories, relating the misfortunes of two lovers, who died suddenly, just as they were going to church. Let the lover be killed in a duel, or lost at sea, or you may make him shoot himself, just as you please; and as for his mistress, she will of course go mad; or if you will, you may kill the lady, and let the lover run mad; only remember, whatever you do, that your hero and heroine must possess a great deal of feeling, and have very pretty names. (TL, 52)<sup>13</sup>

Sophia's letter serves as a starting point for *The Loiterer* to engage in the sort of sexist condescension to 'our fair country-women' that was a convention of masculine literary language in the eighteenth century (TL, 52).<sup>14</sup> Part of this convention is an insistence that the editors are 'not yet old enough,

either as authors or men, to be indifferent to' the 'smiles' of women – making it clear that women's opinions of literature and of literary merit are of concern only insofar that they influence their facial expressions. The chief object of the issue, however, is *The Loiterer's* claim to literary seriousness (echoing Johnson in *The Rambler* No. 1), which the author attempts to prove through a dismissive critique of periodical and magazine fiction. About half of the issue is devoted to this posturing criticism, conducted in the usual tone employed by James Austen in *The Loiterer*, and signed with one of his pseudonymous ciphers.

The inset letter, however, is written in a very different tone, which, along with its content, has led critics to speculate that 'Sophia Sentiment' is an early *nom de plume* of Jane Austen.<sup>15</sup> Peter Sabor, for one, puts forward this view in his introduction to the recent Cambridge edition of Austen's juvenilia, stating that 'the overall case for Austen's authorship of the letter is strong', while on the other hand Claire Tomalin concludes that Sophia Sentiment 'is more likely to have been a transvestite, Henry or James'.<sup>16</sup> Li-Ping Geng argues that *The Loiterer* and the 'literary collaboration between Jane Austen and her Oxford brothers' had important consequences for Austen's future literary career, but falls short of suggesting that theirs was a true, bilateral collaboration, arguing instead that James and Henry 'may have had a large share in shaping their sister's literary identity' and providing her with 'inspiration'.<sup>17</sup> By 1789, however, Austen had already finished many of the stories which she would eventually include in *Volume the First*, the first of three volumes of her juvenilia which she preserved, and in some cases reworked, into adulthood. As Margaret Doody has written, 'Jane Austen was not a child as a writer when she wrote these early pieces. She possessed a sophistication rarely matched in viewing and using her own medium.'<sup>18</sup> Austen is known to have shared these pieces with her family, and most of them carry comically overblown dedications to family members and friends, arguing for a culture of shared literary production, or at least appreciation, in the Austen family.<sup>19</sup> Despite *The Loiterer's* apparent contempt for feminine literary pursuits, the idea that the 13-year-old Austen may have contributed material to her brothers' periodical is far from improbable. Sophia Sentiment's style is not identical with that of Austen's early juvenilia, but it resembles it far more nearly than it does the style employed by James and Henry in the rest of *The Loiterer*. It seems likely that Austen contributed at least an early draft of the letter, which was then 'polished' by James before being incorporated into his periodical's ninth number.<sup>20</sup> There was precedent for the practice of periodical editors' redrafting epistolary contributions from their readers. Joseph Addison, as Jon Klancher writes, 'in *Spectator* 271 implies an intricately knotted relationship between reader and writer'. 'Sometimes indeed I do not make use of the Letter itself', Addison admits, 'but form the Hints of it into Plans of my own Invention, sometimes I take the Liberty to change the Language or Thought into my own way of speaking and thinking.'<sup>21</sup>

Kathryn Sutherland suggests that James Austen's interest and intervention in his sister's writing extended into adulthood, citing his apparent correction of a short satirical verse of hers in 1812. Austen wrote to Martha Lloyd, 'The 4 lines on Miss W. which I sent you were all my own, but James afterwards suggested what I thought a great improvement & as it stands in the Steventon Edition' (L, 205).<sup>22</sup> The context for this suggested 'improvement' is James Austen's self-appointed role as the family poet. In *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, Peter Knox-Shaw points out that Austen's eldest brother wrote poetry 'throughout his life', and he sets out to examine the 'bearing on Jane's novels of this only very recently published body of work'.<sup>23</sup> James Austen's poetry is, at best, uninspired and derivative, and – irrespective of family ties – was as such unlikely to hold much influence over a reader who could be blasé even about Byron.<sup>24</sup> Much like Geng, Knox-Shaw is tempted by what can only be viewed as a chauvinistic desire to exaggerate the 'shaping' influence of James and his poetry on Austen's literary development. There is no novelty in this view, which has affected the reception of Austen's writing at least since the Victorian period and the publication of various Austen family memoirs. As Sutherland writes, 'the consolidation of Austen's art on the side of the homely and family/familial' became 'the family view, propounded by Henry and later by his nephew Austen-Leigh, that Austen circumscribed her art to her brothers' talents, each brother taking a significant share in forming her abilities'.<sup>25</sup> In her recorded 'Opinions of *Mansfield Park*', Austen writes, 'My Eldest Brother – a warm admirer of it in general', a comment that does not suggest any involvement on his part with the novel's production. None of the collected 'Opinions of *Emma*' are attributed to James (MW, 432).

It is possible to suggest a counter-hypothesis to the theory of Austen's artistic development as the product of her brothers' nurturing influence. The great difficulty scholars face in assessing Austen's early career is its overwhelming precocity. Doody's comment that Austen 'was not a child as a writer' when she wrote the stories which make up her juvenilia is frustratingly accurate, and the sparse facts of Austen's biography offer only limited clues as to where, when and how her critical and artistic faculties arose. The first surviving criticism of Austen's writing is a note her father made on the inside front cover of the manuscript notebook called *Volume the Third*:

Effusions of Fancy  
by a very Young Lady  
Consisting of Tales  
in a Style entirely new.<sup>26</sup>

That the 'Lady' who wrote these pieces was 'very Young' is repeated in every careless assessment of Austen's juvenilia. Nowhere in the juvenilia, however, does Austen refer to herself as a 'very young Lady', or even as a

lady: in her witty and irreverent dedications she is always styled as 'THE AUTHOR'. Austen's juvenilia was written between 1787, when she was 11 years old, and 1793. A year or two later she was writing *Lady Susan* and the *ur-Sense and Sensibility* known as 'Elinor and Marianne'. Her formal schooling, such as it was, had finished in 1786 by the time she was ten.<sup>27</sup> After returning to Steventon from boarding school at Reading, Austen's education was essentially self-education, and the course of learning she pursued might be seen as an unusual, even eccentric one. As her juvenilia show, she was training herself for a profession: she wanted to *be* 'THE AUTHOR'. Austen has left us no autobiography, nor even a fictionalised *Künstlerroman*, and we can only guess at how her early commitment to a novelist's career arose. One possible model is that suggested by Charles Dickens in *David Copperfield*, where the eponymous hero, the youngest boy at a new school, gains status and acceptance by retelling novels he has read at home to a dormitory audience:

What ravages I committed on my favorite authors in the course of my interpretation of them, I am not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief, a simple, earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate ... The institution never flagged for want of a story.<sup>28</sup>

Compared to twenty-first-century norms, as Jan Fergus notes, 'reading began very early for gentry and professional children' in the eighteenth century, and pre-school-aged children and schoolboys read novels voraciously, making Byron's claims to have read two thousand novels before he left school almost plausible.<sup>29</sup> The plethora of literary allusions in Austen's juvenilia indicates that she had imbibed, if not thousands, at least dozens of novels by her teenage years. Perhaps the young Austen, like the young David Copperfield, recounted her 'interpretations' of eighteenth-century fiction to the boarders of the Abbey House School, exaggerating their lofty sensibility and dramatic improbabilities to the point of ludicrousness. Like 'poor Traddles', who 'affected to be convulsed with mirth at the comic parts' of David Copperfield's tales, Austen's classmates' laughter may have encouraged her turn for burlesque.<sup>30</sup> 'I could die of laughter at it, as they used to say at school,' Austen wrote to her sister, ten years afterwards (*L*, 5).<sup>31</sup> The fact that the earliest surviving juvenilia, written on Austen's return from school to Steventon, was already highly accomplished burlesque, suggests that it may well have been this captive audience of other very young ladies that heard Austen's first experiments in fiction, and the criticism of fiction called parody.

The satirical sketches in *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second* and *Volume the Third*, lampooning the sentimental literature of the eighteenth century, show the breadth of Austen's early reading. What is remarkable is

the extraordinary understanding of the novel that Austen demonstrates in these short sketches. There is no sign in these early pieces of what Henry James called Austen's 'narrow unconscious perfection of form'.<sup>32</sup> The stories exhibit, on the contrary, a highly developed critical perspective on the novel, and a conscious effort to test the limitations and possibilities of the genre. 'Frederic and Elfrida: A Novel', the first story recorded in *Volume the First*, shows the preoccupations of Austen's juvenilia in microcosm. The title suggests the marriage plots of Austen's six mature novels (and indeed, of most Romantic-era fiction) yet the story's anarchic disregard for the proprieties of novel-writing ensures that it fails to fulfil its title's implied promise of fictionalised romantic happiness. As well as demonstrating Austen's early playful contempt for the marriage plot, it reveals an interest in exposing the rift between sentimental, novelistic language and more mundane or selfishly motivated behaviour. In this and in Austen's other juvenilia, Austen approaches the kind of savage, bawdy satire characteristic of Burney or Henry Fielding.

While Austen's juvenile stories often poke fun at particular texts (Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* is a favourite target), they are more broadly parodies of the novel of sensibility.<sup>33</sup> Their humour is chiefly derived from the juxtaposition of the clichéd landscape of sensibility with figures and behaviours so alien to the polite eighteenth-century sentimental novel that their very existence calls into question the stability of that genre. 'Frederic and Elfrida' is one of Austen's most complex attempts at troubling genre in this way. Its multiple subplots each borrows different stock situations from sentimental fiction and perverts them with gleeful black humour, killing off the good and rewarding those who depart from the principles such novels espouse. Although short, the story is laden with explicit literary references, and steeped in the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel. Its characters negotiate the tropes of sentimental romance, of conduct-book politics and of the novel of manners. Like the rest of Austen's juvenilia, 'Frederic and Elfrida' is also concerned with the technical problems of fiction-making, particularly exposition and continuity of character, the interaction of 'real' and imagined settings, and a timescale that can be stretched to an almost unmeaning elasticity. It is, above all, a story about stories, by a writer whose principal concern was to exercise her artistic and critical powers on the well-worn ground of eighteenth-century fiction.

The story of Elfrida illustrates Austen's ambivalence towards literary fads. The tenth-century Anglo-Saxon queen was the frequent subject of poetry, drama and opera in the eighteenth century. Austen most likely had a literary rather than historical source for the biography of her heroine's namesake: a probable candidate is William Mason's *Elfrida: A Dramatic Poem* (1755), the third edition of which appeared in 1764.<sup>34</sup> Johnson said of the poem that it had 'some good imitations of Milton's bad manner', and it was still

sufficiently well known for Burney to quote from it in *Cecilia* (1782), and for Ann Radcliffe to use it for an epigraph in *The Italian* (1796).<sup>35</sup> Austen co-opts the bloodiest (probably apocryphal) aspect of Elfrida's history – that, while offering her stepson a drink with one hand, she stabbed him to death with the other. Austen may well have recognised the similarities between Elfrida's story and that of Eleanor of Aquitaine's deadly ultimatum to Fair Rosalind: the cup of poison or the dagger.<sup>36</sup> The tale was an extremely popular one in widely available late eighteenth-century chapbooks. In Austen's story Elfrida and Frederic confront another character together, and with one voice offer her a 'smelling Bottle which I enclose in my right hand', as a 'reward' for her compliance with their demands, or else 'this dagger which I enclose in my left shall be steeped in your hearts blood'. In the language of the juvenilia, this is 'gentle & sweet persuasion' (*MW*, 10).<sup>37</sup>

The principal identifiable source for literary parody in 'Frederic and Elfrida' is Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. Like *Grandison's* heroine Harriet Byron, Elfrida and Frederic dare not confess their love for fear of transgressing 'the rules of Propriety' (*MW*, 4). A later scene takes an early opinion from *Grandison's* Harriet Byron – one that relies on the familiar novelistic trope of contrasting female characters for moral and didactic effect – and reworks it to demonstrate its smug priggishness:

Miss Cantillon; very pretty; but visibly proud, affected, and conceited ... Miss Clements; plain; but of a fine understanding, improved by reading; and who having no personal advantages to be vain of, has, by the cultivation of her mind, obtained a preference in every one's opinion over the fair Cantillon.<sup>38</sup>

In Austen's story a similarly self-assured opinion is formed by Frederic, Elfrida and their friend Charlotte simultaneously; at first they are 'struck with the engaging Exterior' of Jezalinda, but they are soon attracted by her sister Rebecca's enchanting conversation. In unison they declare:

'Lovely & too charming Fair one, notwithstanding your forbidding Squint, your greazy tresses & your swelling Back, which are more frightfull than imagination can paint or pen describe, I cannot refrain from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind, which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance must ever inspire the unwary visitor.' (*MW*, 6)

Rebecca also resembles Eugenia Tyrold, the pox-scarred, 'little hump-back gentlewoman' from Burney's *Camilla*. Eugenia is taught acceptance of her lot when her father takes her to see a beautiful young woman, who was 'born an idiot'. The spectacle of this 'shocking imbecility' persuades Eugenia that 'beauty, without mind, is more dreadful than any deformity'.<sup>39</sup>

Most of the barbs in 'Frederic and Elfrida' are not aimed directly at an identifiable source, however, but rather at the excesses of various popular genres. A story of the courtship of identical first cousins, Elfrida and Frederic, it is set up as one of the incestuous family romances popular in the eighteenth-century novel.<sup>40</sup> There are also references to epistolary novels (with the story's single, business-like inset letter), to the fantastic landscape descriptions of Romance and to the histories of young ladies' entrances into the world. By squashing all these established literary genres into the one tiny story – just over eight pages in Chapman's edition – Austen questions all the agreed conventions which bring genre into being. Her writing, while precisely mimicking the tropes and tics that set each genre apart, is thus demonstrably – and radically – antagonistic to all preconceived rules upon which fiction operates.

The role of time in the realist novel also falls under Austen's scrutiny in 'Frederic and Elfrida'. As the novel careens towards its conclusion, the heroine's indecision means that 'Weeks & Fortnights flew away without gaining the least ground', until the newly departed bride and groom return to 'introduce to her their beautifull Daughter of eighteen' (MW, 11).<sup>41</sup> As in Elizabeth Inchbald's 1791 novel *A Simple Story*, the reader

is desired to imagine seventeen years elapsed, since he has seen or heard of any of those persons, who in the foregoing volumes have been introduced to his acquaintance – and now, supposing himself at the period of those seventeen years, follow the sequel of their history.<sup>42</sup>

In Inchbald's story 17 years effect a near-complete reversal in the feelings and fortunes of her characters. Part of Austen's joke is to insist on her characters' utter stasis: Elfrida and her wedding clothes have aged like Miss Havisham, and it is with 'mortification' and 'horror' that she realises a new generation of characters is threatening to wrest control of the narrative (MW, 11). Time is one of the least stable elements in 'Frederic and Elfrida', and it is only one of the story's many fictional inconstancies.

The characters of this very short story exist in a world that is radically mutable, and as they hurtle through the plot various settings loom in and out of focus, each more far-fetched than the last. Most of the action is set in the 'sweet village' of Crankhumdunberry, where a sentimental population amuses itself for hours in a

Grove of Poplars which led from the Parsonage to a verdant Lawn enamelled with a variety of variegated flowers & watered by a purling Stream, brought from the Valley of Tempé by a passage under ground. (MW, 5)

Here the accoutrements of eighteenth-century Romance intrude into the familiar pastoral setting, suggested by the 'Parsonage', of much sentimental

fiction.<sup>43</sup> In *The Female Quixote* (1752) Charlotte Lennox also refers, satirically, to the Valley of Tempé (a classical reference used by seventeenth-century romancer Madeleine de Scudéry in *Clelia*) when her heroine Arabella compares Bath unfavourably to that ‘beautiful Valley ... celebrated by all the Poets and Historians ... which excited the Curiosity of all Travellers whatever’.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas in Lennox’s novel the heroine is alone in giving credence to the claims of veracity in the romances she reads, in Austen’s story images from romance are incorporated without any of the characters remarking upon their incongruity. This technique may also be seen in Austen’s insertion of a stream into a real, fashionable London street. The fictional stream is referred to several times, both in prose and verse, after Charlotte, perplexed, throws ‘her sweet Body & her lovely face | Into the Stream that runs thro’ Portland Place’ (*MW*, 9). This is the kind of factual error which late eighteenth-century reviewers loved to skewer, one that indicates an author’s fallacious pretensions to high social status. While Austen does indeed appear to be mocking the tendency of novels to focus on the lives of extremely wealthy, nobly born characters, she is also insisting on the right of authors to fabricate – deliberately to create fictions to suit their purposes – and to manipulate their depictions of reality to serve the demands of their novels.

Several critics, most importantly Raymond Williams, have sought to draw attention to the *unreality* of the settings of Austen’s novels. Williams explains that the effect of Austen’s art is to make a specific kind of fictional world that, for some readers at least, can be almost hermetically sealed off from the ‘real current of history’. ‘Jane Austen’s world’, he argues, ‘can then be taken for granted, even sometimes patronised as a rural backwater, as if it were a simple “traditional” setting’.<sup>45</sup> In fact, the world of the novels, which at times seems so natural in its realism, is an elaborate fictional construct, and in the juvenilia we can observe the foundations of its architecture. By running a stream through Portland Place, Austen renders the real geography of London streets both unreliable to the reader, and material ripe for a novelist’s imaginative play.

Austen’s manipulation of character in the juvenilia follows a different, and frequently misunderstood pattern, one which teleological analyses of her early fiction dismiss for apparently failing to prefigure her later achievements. Patricia Meyer Spacks has commented that the characters of the juvenilia ‘lack the development and complexity that long-established literary convention has led us to expect in fictional renditions of the human. Yet they possess a strange energy on the page.’ It is, she continues, ‘the energy of obsession, their own and their author’s’ – for as a young writer, Spacks believes, ‘Austen could only imagine people of this sort’.<sup>46</sup> What Spacks overlooks is that the imagined people of ‘Frederic and Elfrida’ are, in fact, not people at all. They are characters – types drawn from a number of

fictional conventions – who exist primarily so that their writer may explore the function they perform in their genre of origin.

Claudia Johnson explores this facet of Austen's fictional experimentation in her reading of 'Frederic and Elfrida'. She writes that 'the juvenilia are devoted almost exclusively to exploring and exposing the agendas of fictional conventions, some of which are manifestly and some implicitly political'. Johnson reminds readers of Austen's juvenilia that

throughout the 1790s, the formative years of Austen's career, there were few subjects *more* anxiously debated as central to national well-being than female manners. Thus, portions of the juvenilia likely to appear to us variously as the most cute, slight, and precocious are often, in fact, the most laden with controversy.<sup>47</sup>

Johnson offers the example of Elfrida's friend Charlotte, whose 'character was a willingness to oblige every one'. Rather than allow her readers to ignore this pat phrase, Austen insists that its full implications be played out. As she is never 'able to resolve to make any one miserable', Charlotte obligingly accepts two marriage proposals in quick succession, and has no way out but suicide (*MW*, 4, 8). Johnson identifies Charlotte's behaviour with that prescribed for young women by contemporary moralists: being 'sweet and agreeable is every good girl's object in life'. Johnson argues that in Hannah More's influential conduct literature, young women's moral or behavioural shortcomings 'are not conceived of as failures of morality per se but rather as lapses of "agreeableness" ... one thing needful to guarantee paternal authority'. 'Considered in this light,' concludes Johnson, aping Austen's alliteration, 'Charlotte's suicide appears not as a reversal but actually as a comically condensed fulfillment of conventional codes.'<sup>48</sup>

In Charlotte's suicide, and in the marriages of Elfrida and Frederic, Rebecca and Captain Roger, and Jezalinda and the coachman, we see that it is not obsessive characters – as Spacks claims – but rather obsessive plots that drive 'Frederic and Elfrida'. Those that cannot be married off must be ruthlessly destroyed, so that 'this little adventure' can end 'to the satisfaction of all parties' (*MW*, 5). By condensing and exaggerating the typical eighteenth-century marriage plot, Austen demonstrates her early understanding of the novel as a politically coercive form. As Johnson writes, 'Austen's parodic manipulation of conventional material alienates us from such material precisely so as to oblige us to perceive and to challenge interests that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.'<sup>49</sup> This agenda, so sensitively and unshakably attuned to the political function of fiction, is pursued throughout the juvenilia.

Although the nature of their writing differs, Austen's youthful commitment to writing is no different from that evinced by, for example, the

young Byron or the Brontë siblings.<sup>50</sup> The changing educational practices noted by William St Clair bear some responsibility for encouraging juvenile writers:

Quite suddenly, in the course of a few years from about 1780, English literature became the principal source of texts for English education, aiming to associate learning with reading, reading with pleasure, pleasure with beauty, and beauty with virtue. Instead of centrally approved *sententiae*, or as we might say nowadays, 'clichés', children were now offered substantial passages from famous English authors, often passages of great beauty and literary quality. Instead of catechetic question-and-answer methods, in which pupils were presented with single questions to which they were expected to give a single correct answer, the new school books offered texts which had to be read critically.<sup>51</sup>

Along with encouragement to read literature, and to read it critically, the literary environment of the time, by promoting the work of non-professionals and of the kinds of short fiction that is easily attempted by amateurs and children, made this kind of childhood writing inevitable. The literary magazines, periodicals and reviews were instrumental in creating this environment. Periodicals in particular have significance for a study of Austen's critical reading practices, because they provided a popular forum for short tales such as those in the juvenilia, but also a place in which critics could discuss literature from the past, or purely in the abstract, without the need to tether their comments to the review of a new publication. Placing such critical essays amongst those explicitly addressing moral concerns also cemented the understanding of literature as a (potentially problematic) moral tool. In *The Spectator*, Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, *The Rambler* and their ilk, critics could revisit the works of, to take two much-debated examples, Milton and Shakespeare, assessing their conformity to Enlightenment theories of literary composition and demonstrating their continuing, even eternal, significance. By subjecting modern, English texts to the kind of detailed attention previously reserved for classical (that is, Ancient Greek and Roman) literature, the periodical essayists asserted those works' claims to a similar literary authority. The treatment of these texts also contributed to a 'polite' culture of literature as a shared birthright of the Englishman *and* the Englishwoman, who was encouraged to read and study such 'classics' of English literature in a way that she could not study Greek and Latin classics. The periodical essay, therefore, is another means of literary canon construction in the eighteenth century and, in the case of the novel, a means of assessing and delineating the nature of a relatively new literary genre. It is not only in the pages of periodicals, however, that this critical work is performed. Just as crucial was the role to be played by collections of novels themselves.

The close relationship between collections of novels and early critical attempts to define and appraise the novel as a genre can be seen in one of the earliest collections of novels in English, Samuel Croxall's expensively produced, four-volume *Select Collection of Novels*, published in 1720 (Croxall published an expanded collection in six volumes two years later).<sup>52</sup> The emphasis Croxall, in his preface, places on the quality rather than novelty of his collection, however, suggests the possibility of his awareness of more than one earlier collection of novels, or romances, in English. It is unclear if Croxall is distinguishing his collection from previous anthologies, or merely from previous English editions of the individual novels. He writes that the

Publisher being fully apprised of the Nature of his Undertaking, and observing how wretchedly some of these Novels have been formerly translated into *English*, did not only get them done over again by complete Masters both of the Subject and the two Languages; but likewise took Care to have the others, which had never been attempted, to be translated by as able Hands, all of 'em being Men of Letters: So that, in every Respect we have mention'd, it may be said, without the least Appearance of Presumption, that so Choice a Collection as this has not hitherto appear'd in this Kingdom.<sup>53</sup>

Few of the 'novels' in Croxall's anthology would be readily recognised as such today. Texts like the seventeenth-century *Zaïde* and *The Princess of Cleves*, both by Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette, are likely to have been classified as romances by the end, and potentially even by the middle, of the eighteenth century. In Lennox's 1752 novel *The Female Quixote*, these 'histories' are judged similarly to the medieval romances thrown upon the priest's bonfire in *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Croxall, indeed, includes the history of 'The Curious Penitent' from Cervantes's novel in his collection.

Distinguishing between romance and novel is not part of Croxall's project, perhaps because such a distinction was unlikely to promote the commercial success of his collection: instead he is at pains to stress the legitimacy of the romance/novel in general. Croxall begins his anthology with a lengthy essay on the history of the novel/romance by the French bishop and man of letters Pierre-Daniel Huet. Huet's essay was originally published as a preface to Lafayette's *Zaïde*.<sup>54</sup> In his essay, Huet mentions most of the touchstones of eighteenth-century novelistic criticism. Throughout the essay as prefixed to Croxall's *Select Collection*, the French *roman* is translated as 'romance' rather than 'novel', and Croxall himself uses both terms interchangeably. Huet writes that

Romances, properly so call'd, are Fictions of Love Adventures artfully form'd and deliver'd in Prose, for the Delight and Instruction of the Readers. I call Romance a Fiction to Distinguish it from History, and

a Fiction of Love Adventures, because Love ought to be the principal subject of a Romance. It must be written in Prose, to conform itself to the Custom of the Age; it must be contriv'd with Art, under some certain Rules, otherwise it will be a confus'd Mass without Order or Beauty. The chief Design of a Romance, and which the Writer ought in the first place to have in View, is the Instruction of his Reader, before whom he is to represent the Reward of Virtue, and Chastisement of Vice ... So that Delight, which the ingenious Romancer seems to make his chief Design, is in effect no other than a Medium subordinate to the principal End, the Instruction of the Mind, and Reformation of the Manners; and Romances are more or less regular as they come up more or less to this Definition.<sup>55</sup>

Huet's definition reflects those that can be found in the paratextual material, that is, the dedications and prefaces, of early novels. It was, writes Joseph Bartolomeo, practitioners of the genre – rather than its critics – who first attempted to articulate the novel's constitutive attributes. Bartolomeo argues that 'Commentary *within* novels ... was necessary to establish the legitimacy of the form.'<sup>56</sup> With a very different commercial purpose from Croxall, William Congreve stresses the differences between the two forms in his preface to *Incognita*. Locating his own work in the (implicitly superior) camp of the novel, Congreve writes:

Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins [*sic*], Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of [*sic*], and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concern'd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, *viz.* these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye. Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight.<sup>57</sup>

Samuel Johnson's influential statements in *The Rambler* No. 4 demonstrate the extent to which the generic definition put forward by Congreve had been established, and also how Huet's emphasis on the novel's didactic and moralising function had become entrenched. Johnson describes novels as books that 'are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life'. Johnson distinguishes between 'the heroic romance' and the 'works

of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted', which 'exhibit life in its true state'.<sup>58</sup> Johnson does not, however, explore the development of the genre in any greater depth.

Clara Reeve's 1785 work, *The Progress of Romance*, is the first serious attempt in English to define and promote the genres of the romance and the novel, while establishing their joint history. Reeve's declared aim, 'to mark the distinguishing characters of the Romance and the Novel, to point out the boundaries of both', was arguably her greatest original contribution to literary criticism.<sup>59</sup> Her definitions, as two scholars arguing for the central role of women critics in history argue, 'have not basically been altered since she set them forth'.<sup>60</sup> Reeve's definitions, however, are not pronouncements *ex nihilo*, but conclusions based on substantial research. She draws on Huet's earlier work, debating the differences between the romance and the novel in similar and, at times, identical terms to Huet's, and broadly agreeing with him that 'Romances are of universal growth, and not confined to any particular period or countries'. Unlike Huet, Croxall or Congreve, Reeve has the advantage of having access to several more decades of novel publication to provide evidence for her arguments, and *The Progress of Romance* is thus more an account of a genre gaining in importance and respectability, rather than an attempt to define an emerging literary form. Her distinction between novel and romance builds on ideas that Johnson's *Rambler* No. 4 implies are widely accepted, but Reeve, unlike previous critics, is conscious of and positive about the two forms' intertwined history. Throughout the work Reeve argues for the acceptance of the romance and of the novel as serious, polite genres, and that novels 'are equally entitled to our attention and respect, as any other works of Genius and literature'. Reeve offers brief criticisms of many works, and her opinions clearly reflect, if they do not outright influence, the later eighteenth century's increasingly censorious taste. Her positive attitude towards romances in general does not prevent her from roundly criticising many of the romance-novel hybrids of the early modern period. The 'books of the last age', she writes, 'were of worse tendency than any of those of the present'. Unsurprisingly, Reeve prefers Richardson to Henry Fielding; she refuses to even name any of Delarivier Manley's works, or any of Eliza Haywood's early amatory fiction. Likewise, her comment that Sarah Fielding should be ranked equally with her brother as a novelist, and that her 'fame smells sweet, and will do so to late posterity', amounts to an early and very serious attempt at forming a canon of the eighteenth-century novel.<sup>61</sup>

Reeve owes some obvious debts to Huet, but *The Progress of Romance* is clearly the result of a great deal of original research: Euphronia, Reeve's mouthpiece in the 'evening conversation', admits to having spent years reading and collecting novels and romances. Some 30 years later, towards the end of Austen's life, John Dunlop published his own *History of Fiction*.

Although his project seems very similar to Reeve's, he ignores her earlier work, writing that in 'this country, there has been no attempt towards a general History of Fiction. Dr Percy, Warton, and others, have written, as is well known, with much learning and ingenuity, on that branch of the subject which relates to the origin of *Romantic Fiction* – the marvellous decorations of chivalry.'<sup>62</sup> Dunlop's work attracted the attention of both *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Quarterly Review*, evidence Ina Ferris cites for her argument that 'the novel was beginning to make itself felt decisively as a significant cultural form' at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ferris, like Dunlop, overlooks Reeve and her work from the previous century. The emergence of the novel as a genre that 'critical discourse could no longer afford simply to dismiss' in fact took place closer to the beginning of what we now call the Romantic period, spurred on by marked changes in publishing practices.<sup>63</sup>

The appearance of Reeve's *Progress of Romance* in 1785, in fact, suggests that Reeve's study was connected to a renewal of interest in the history of the novel as a genre sparked by James Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine* which, beginning in 1780, republished 23 volumes' worth of novels and romances by a range of mostly British and French writers. In his somewhat myopic analysis of Harrison's collection, Richard Taylor claims that in the 1770s and 1780s, 'some critics, while granting that a few exemplary talents had contributed to the genre, felt that the form [of the novel] had creatively exhausted itself. This suspicion,' he continues, 'along with a general and persistent panic over the state of British letters, may have contributed to a boom in retrospective publications in the 1780s,' in which Harrison participated.<sup>64</sup>

Michael Gamer offers a far more convincing account of the impetus for *The Novelist's Magazine* and its successors – one supported by the work of other materialist scholars – and of the historical context influencing literary canonisation during Austen's lifetime. 'To the extent that literary periods define themselves by the works they canonize as well as by the works they print,' Gamer writes,

the year 1774 should stand as doubly conspicuous to Romanticists and to historians of genre. The year of *Donaldson v. Beckett*, the House of Lords' decision that ended perpetual copyright in Britain, 1774 saw fundamental changes in book production as publishers rushed to reprint titles suddenly in the public domain ... With the term of copyright now set at twenty-one years and with a host of British writers from John Milton to James Thomson thrust into the public domain, *Donaldson* did more than affect the profits of British publishers; it directed their attention to British authors and away from foreign ones who, repackaged in the form of new translations, had previously been the staple of new editions, anthologies, and collections.<sup>65</sup>

The House of Lords did not, technically, end perpetual copyright in Britain with *Donaldson v. Beckett*. That reform had been legislatively achieved by the Copyright Act of Queen Anne in 1710, known as the Statute of Anne. Before then, as William St Clair explains, the 'first man [*sic*] to print an ancient text took it into his private ownership, and that of his heirs or assigns, for ever'. St Clair compares the printers to the invading European colonists appropriating '*terra nullius*' in the New World, and to the 'English landowners who, step by step, sometimes under ineffectual protest, enclosed the real property of English common lands, and then charged the villagers a rent for grazing their animals on them'. In the same way, St Clair argues, 'the London book industry took into its private ownership much of the traditional common culture of England, and then charged a rent for using it'.<sup>66</sup> The Statute of Anne ought, theoretically, to have done away with this system of publishers' perpetual monopolies. Until 1774, however, publishers maintained, through several successful court actions in both England and Scotland, that they held a common law property right that was not extinguished by the 1710 Act. In *Donaldson v. Beckett* the then Attorney General, Edward Thurlow, successfully argued that the copyright property enacted by the Statute of Anne 'was a new law to give learned men a property which they had not before, and that it was an incontrovertible proof that there previously existed no common law right' of perpetual copyright.<sup>67</sup> Copyright was now owned by the author of a work, to endure for 14 years only (21 years for existing copyright holders) rather than being the immutable property of the printer.<sup>68</sup> Suddenly, almost the entire corpus of English fiction and non-fiction entered the public domain, and could be reprinted by any publisher who saw a profitable opportunity.

St Clair argues persuasively that the nature of the English book market changed utterly in the year before Austen's birth. The printers' perpetual monopolies over copyright meant that on 'the eve of the romantic period, the printed literature available to a large constituency of readers was not much different from what it had been 200 years before'.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, writes Richard Altick, 'we may be fairly sure that by 1780 the national literacy rate was scarcely higher than it had been during the Elizabethan period'. Many of those who could read, Altick continues, could not afford to buy books. 'A woman in one of the London trades during the 1770's could have bought a three-volume novel in paper covers only with the proceeds of a week's work'.<sup>70</sup> After the House of Lords' decision in 1774, St Clair writes, 'a huge, previously suppressed, demand for reading was met by a huge surge in the supply of books ... All the older printed texts first printed in England entered, or returned to, the public domain, available to be legally reprinted by anyone ... at whatever price.' The 'moment that intellectual property restrictions were lifted', St Clair writes, 'we find an outpouring of abridgements of older texts which, along with anthologies, were to become one of the largest components of the reading of the romantic period'.<sup>71</sup> Leah Price

argues that the novel 'could not have become respectable without the tokenism embodied in the anthology',<sup>72</sup> but just as significant for the position of the novel in the late eighteenth century – and for the formation of a novelistic canon whose membership is still contested – was the reprinting of whole texts, such as those in Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine*, which for the first time came into the public domain.

Harrison and those who followed him reprinted those novels likely to meet with commercial success, either because of their popularity or their perceived prestige. Each large-scale project thus added to the formation of a novelistic canon, by making available to late eighteenth-century readers collections of older novels that were nonetheless seen as having continued moral relevance or literary importance. The 'decades that followed *Donaldson v. Beckett* constitute,' writes Gamer, 'if not an Age of Canonization, a span of years in which venture publicists, aided by two revolutions and over two decades of world conflict, became canon-builders by reprinting British authors on an unprecedented scale'.<sup>73</sup> Reprinting has the effect of transforming what was once ephemeral and time-bound into a more permanent object enduring through history. Fictional prose becomes, in effect, deathless, as reprinting at once enables a novel's durability as well as its distribution to new generations of readers, and seems to prove its ahistorical importance. Reprinting allows readers to revisit old literature, and for new readers to appreciate books from the past. In so doing, a canon of literature with agreed (or at least perceived) permanent value is created. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes, not that 'which we have *read*, but that to which we *return*, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power'.<sup>74</sup> Without reprinting, in other words, there can be no canon. After 1774, collections of essays, sermons, plays and poetry articulated canons for those genres. For novels, collections like *The Novelist's Magazine* both initiated the making of a canon and signified that the novel as a genre had won its place in literature. 'Transformed in the aftermath of *Donaldson v. Beckett*', Gamer writes, 'the select collection merged the discriminating practices of the anthology with the representative claims of the collection,' becoming 'a literalized, material embodiment of the literary canon'.<sup>75</sup>

The major exercise of *The Novelist's Magazine* was followed in 1810 by Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 50-volume edition of *The British Novelists*, with a lengthy introductory essay setting out Barbauld's critical attitudes to the genre. Barbauld's *British Novelists*, appearing in the year before the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*, has of all the collections of novels the most significance for readers of Jane Austen. In it, Barbauld evinces many of the same aims and performs many of the same functions as the earlier collections and histories of the novel. In her preface to the collection, Barbauld claims a high level of achievement amongst contemporary novelists: 'notwithstanding the many paltry books of this kind published in the course of every year,' she writes, 'it may safely be affirmed that we have more good

writers in this walk living at the present time, than at any period since the days of Richardson and Fielding'. She adds that a 'very great proportion of these are ladies: and surely it will not be said that either taste or morals have been losers by their taking the pen in hand. The names of D'Arblay, Edgeworth, Inchbald, Radcliffe, and a number more, will vindicate this assertion.'<sup>76</sup>

'Barbauld's *British Novelists* series', argues Terry Castle, 'was in itself an act of feminist advocacy.'<sup>77</sup> Barbauld's emphasis on the significance of women writers' contribution to the novel is borne out by her inclusion of many novels by women in her collection. Eight of the 21 authors whose novels feature in *British Novelists* are women. More tellingly, in light of Barbauld's statement that 'we have more good writers [of novels] living at the present time, than at any period since the days of Richardson and Fielding', is the fact that of the eight novels included in *British Novelists* that were originally published after 1790 – that is, within the 20 years preceding the collection's publication – only one, Robert Bage's *Hermesprong*, is the product of a male author.<sup>78</sup>

The importance of a collection like *British Novelists* to the establishment of the novel as a genre should not be underestimated. Like *The Novelist's Magazine*, Barbauld's collection enabled the republication of many works long out of print, while her introductory essays encouraged readers to take the novels seriously, and, indeed, to take the novel seriously as a genre. Her reputation as a poet and critic – especially prior to 1812 and the hostile reception of her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* – lent gravitas to the undertaking, as would Scott's similar project for Ballantyne in the 1820s.<sup>79</sup> Figure 1, a graphic comparison of the three substantial collections – Barbauld's, Scott's and Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine* – conspicuously demonstrates the kinds of canon-making choices that such collections involve.

As Figure 1 shows, one obvious shift between Harrison's and Barbauld's collection is the concept of the English novel as a distinct form and tradition, created by Barbauld's project to 'make the novels of a country', thereby excluding the novel in translation from a new canon of British novels. In her introductory essay, however, Barbauld places the novel written in English in the context of a broader European tradition of literature, highlighting the contributions made to its development by authors such as Miguel de Cervantes, Madeleine de Scudéry, Stéphanie de Genlis and Voltaire, and characterises Germans as 'a very book-making people'.<sup>80</sup> This selective removal of French, Spanish and German fiction to form a canon of British novels prefigures the development of 'English literature' as a cultural concept and an academic discipline. It is important, nevertheless, to understand Barbauld's collection in light of her introductory essay, which clearly demonstrates her wider interest in European fiction and an understanding similar to Clara Reeve's of the scope of international influences on 'British' novels.<sup>81</sup>

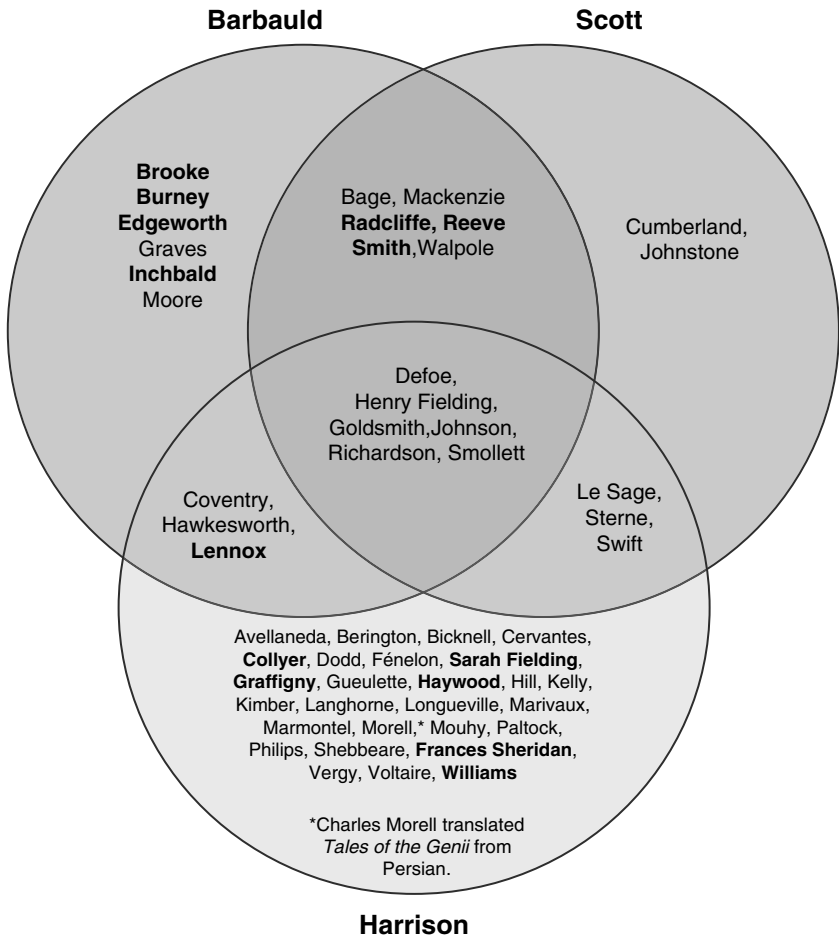


Figure 1 Novelists in three Romantic-era novel anthologies: Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine* (1780–89), Barbauld's *British Novelists* (1810) and Walter Scott's *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* (1821–24). (Women authors in bold type.)

Of equal significance to the development of an early novelistic canon is Barbauld's inclusion of women novelists. As Claudia Johnson writes, her 'selection presumes the artistic legitimacy of women novelists'. For Barbauld, Johnson continues, the 'novel is a "polite" form, where polite signifies a heterosocial discursive space, one open to women and men on equal terms'.<sup>82</sup> Barbauld was not alone in her appreciation of contemporary women writers. Maria Edgeworth recognised herself as belonging to a growing class: 'Women of literature', she writes in 1795, 'are much more numerous of late than they

were a few years ago. They make a class in society, they fill the public eye, and have acquired a degree of consequence and an appropriate character.'<sup>83</sup> As we have already seen, the more lately published novels included by Barbauld were in fact heavily weighted towards women authors. Despite her confidence regarding the place of women in her collection and in the development of the novel, as Johnson concedes, 'Barbauld's vision of the novel and the canon it supported didn't take.' Johnson cites both the critical attacks on Barbauld following the publication of *Eighteen-Hundred and Eleven* and the impact of Scott's *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* which, Johnson writes, 'despite its eventual commercial failure, quickly gained a normative status by virtue of Scott's enormous prestige and the durability of his lives of the novelists' – critical essays republished separately to the edition. My comparison of the authors selected for the three major Romantic-era collections demonstrates the kinds of choices each editor made, and the resultant, widely disseminated idea of the canon. Through such a comparison, we can see compelling evidence for Johnson's argument that, for Scott, 'the British novel becomes principally the complete works of a few men who by virtue of his selection become great authors', and that the 'deeply conservative tendencies we now almost reflexively contribute to canon-making were in the case of the British novel clearly reactions to and revisions of an earlier effort in which dissent was broadly a constitutive element'.<sup>84</sup> Where Scott's selection overlaps those of both *The Novelist's Magazine* and Barbauld's *British Novelists*, it forms the canon we associate with Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). After discounting Johnson as principally an essayist, and Oliver Goldsmith as a playwright, we are left with three 'fathers of the novel': Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding.<sup>85</sup>

The highly exclusive canon articulated by Watt was already emerging in the early nineteenth-century narrative of the novel's development. By 1815 William Hazlitt could write about the evolution of the genre solely with reference to male writers, in a way that would have been impossible for Clara Reeve 30 years earlier. 'It has been usual to class our own great novelists', he writes, 'as imitators of one or other of [Cervantes and Le Sage]. Fielding, no doubt, is more like Don Quixote than Gil Blas; Smollett is more like Gil Blas than Don Quixote; but there is not much resemblance in either case.'<sup>86</sup> Collections like Scott's *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* created a canon of the eighteenth-century novel that excluded (most) women writers along with (most) novels from the later decades of the century. At the same time, the selectivity and conscious political and literary bias of Reviews like *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly* reinforced the status of a very few novelists at the expense of the majority. *The Edinburgh's* focus on 'academic writings, especially the Scottish specialities of science, philosophy, and political economy', meant that it had 'little room for imaginative literature'.<sup>87</sup> As Clifford Siskin writes, '[n]o single event illustrates so clearly' the changing critical environment for women writers at the turn of the nineteenth

century 'than the founding in 1802 of the *Edinburgh Review*'.<sup>88</sup> Together, argues Klancher, *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly* appeared to incorporate all early nineteenth-century thought:

No discourse was so immediately identified with power in the nineteenth century as that of the great party quarterlies, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* ... the two reviews carved between them what seemed to be the universe of political thought.<sup>89</sup>

Women writers do not fare well at the hands of *The Edinburgh's* critics. Laura Runge cites William Hazlitt's infamous review of Burney's final novel *The Wanderer* in *The Edinburgh*, to demonstrate its power to bring about a profound shift in an author's critical reception. Burney had been the pre-eminent woman novelist of the late eighteenth century, arguably the pre-eminent novelist of either gender. Her work is repeatedly praised by eighteenth-century critics, not only in reviews of her own books, but also as a pattern for other writers to follow. 'Burney stands out', writes Runge, as the novelist 'most cited and held up for imitation'.<sup>90</sup> Hazlitt's caustic and chauvinistic review of *The Wanderer* must be read in this context, as staging an attack not only on Burney, but also, implicitly, on any woman novelist with serious literary credibility, or even pretensions.<sup>91</sup> Runge writes that Hazlitt

documents the turn in critical fortunes for the woman author, making gender the most significant criterion in the hierarchy of novelists ... Instead of ranking Burney among the best novelists – he identifies Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne – Hazlitt groups Burney with unnamed and clearly unregarded women writers. In the process he articulates a gendered theory of the novel that associates literary criteria with the biological and social attributes of sex ... Hazlitt's essay signals a change in the status of the female novelist, one in which 'female' takes on greater importance than 'novelist'. It closes that window of time in which the female novelist could not be ignored.<sup>92</sup>

The professionalisation of the new species of reviews also put an end to the culture of amateur contribution which had characterised many of the earlier periodicals. This change would have significant implications for the development and consolidation of critical discourse in the nineteenth century. 'From the *Edinburgh Review* on', argues Klancher, 'public knowledge of ample payments to contributors signalled the distancing of the audience.' In the nineteenth-century journals that followed its lead, 'a powerful transauthorial discourse' emerged.<sup>93</sup>

The consequences were grim, in the nineteenth century and beyond, for the eighteenth-century canon of novels. Yet it is important to recognise that this conception of the literary canon, with its bias towards male writers,

was in its infancy in Austen's lifetime, and gaining traction only late in her career. She did not live to see Scott's *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library*, and witnessed only the beginnings of the revisionist attempts of the newly professionalised, male-dominated critical industry to erase the earlier efforts of women commentators on the novel; an industry that seemed entrenched by the beginning of the Victorian period. What little evidence we have suggests that Austen was beginning to resent the appropriation of the novel by 'masculine' writers: her response to the publication of *Waverley* has a touch of bitterness: 'Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. – It is not fair. – He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths' (L, 289). As Jocelyn Harris argues, the harsh reviews of *The Wanderer* in both *The Quarterly* and *The Edinburgh* likely inspired much of the proto-feminist debate in *Persuasion*, and 'Austen would implicitly counter Hazlitt's linkage of gendered minds to gendered bodies in the final scene at the White Hart'.<sup>94</sup> Evidence like this, from Austen's own writing, suggests that her personal literary canon privileges men and women writers equally, and flattens the traditional hierarchies of genre. Pursuing such textual evidence can allow Austen's readers to reconstruct this canon, and in doing so to guess at Austen's critical and creative processes.

The half-century of criticism following Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* has led to the construction of a new canon of eighteenth-century novels, one that has particularly benefited, in the 1970s and after, from the work of feminist critics.<sup>95</sup> Considering the selections in Barbauld's *British Novelists*, however, this 'new' canon appears after all to be closer to a reconstruction of a canon already in existence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and including not only the works of women authors, but also a wide range of stylistic and generic differences, all understood as inherently and coherently novels. These are the texts that critics such as Marilyn Butler, Claudia Johnson, Margaret Kirkham and Jocelyn Harris have identified as forming the literary matrix within which Austen's works should be read. Barbauld's *British Novelists*, along with the work of critics like Clara Reeve, demonstrates the growing respectability of these novels at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the increased acceptance of the novel as a legitimate literary genre.

A role for women as critics and arbiters of this genre was also mooted. Mary Waters quotes David Hume's comment that 'all Men of Sense, who know the World, have a great Deference for [women's] Judgment of such Books as ly within the Compass of their Knowledge, and repose more Confidence in the Delicacy of their Taste, tho' unguided by Rules, than in all the dull Labours of Pedants and Commentators'.<sup>96</sup> Despite its apparent support for women critics, Hume's language points to the problems they faced. If 'unguided by Rules', women's criticism will lack authority, and those books that lie 'within the Compass' of women's knowledge may turn

out to be few indeed. While any balanced study of the development of criticism in the period demonstrates the overwhelming participation of women critics, it also makes clear their precarious position within the field of literature, and the powerful efforts made to efface criticism by women from the cultural memory.

As the novel grew in importance and cemented its legitimacy as a literary genre, the production and criticism of novels were steadily appropriated by professional, male writers. Laura Runge points out that 'the basic requirements of the critic, [are] judgement, imagination and intellect' and that 'eighteenth-century discourse preserved these privileges for male subjects'. Even when women possessed these attributes, 'literary discourse labelled them as masculine'.<sup>97</sup> As Terry Castle writes, in their major contributions to novelistic criticism at the turn of the nineteenth century,

Genlis and Staël defended women's writing and predicted that female authors, and especially female critics, would play an increasingly prominent role in the literature of the future ... Such heady sentiments, as one might expect, found little immediate echo in mainstream criticism. Nor must it be said – in the decades to come – did female critics find the acceptance that Staël and Genlis so optimistically predicted. Indeed, as the study of literature became more and more professionalized and institutionalized after 1800, the opposite often seemed to be the case. For most of the nineteenth century, literary criticism remained a predominantly male-identified activity: the early contributions of women to critical thought were soon forgotten. Dryden, Pope, Boileau, Johnson, Diderot, Wordsworth, Coleridge and other male writers were canonized as the great originators of the great modern literary-critical tradition; the works of Behn, Montagu, Riccoboni, Inchbald, Barbauld, Genlis and even Staël herself (not to mention those of lesser figures) were consigned to oblivion.<sup>98</sup>

Much of this process was effected by the revitalised review culture of the early nineteenth century, which promoted certain novels' literary legitimacy while enforcing a set of critical values whose homogeneity and assured authority forestalled the possibility of disagreement or debate. The publication of the hugely influential *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review*, among others, began a new era of literary criticism that would dominate nineteenth-century literary views. The new reviews were marked by their selectivity. Unlike their eighteenth-century predecessors and competitors, reviews like *The Edinburgh* never attempted an exhaustive account of all books currently on the market. As Derek Roper explains, the available evidence

strongly suggests that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century [the older reviews] were as ably staffed and as honestly edited as those of any

later period. What, then, caused their retreat before the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*? The answer is that the new journals adopted new roles more suited to an age in which both books and readers were becoming very much more numerous. In some respects the new Reviews were more ambitious than the old; in other respects they were less so, for it was the very ambitiousness, in scope, of the *Monthly* type of Review which brought about its demise in the new century.<sup>99</sup>

The very selectivity of the new reviews encouraged readers and reviewers to distinguish some novels from the rest of the 'trash with which the press now groans' (NA, 37), which both created new impetus for canon-formation and solidified the respectability of the chosen few.

The reviews themselves gained an unprecedented popularity for critical literature, influencing contemporary readers' understanding of their age as a highly literate and literary one. In *Mansfield Park*, the fashionable pretence to cultural and political engagement made by the Rushworths in their Tory stronghold at Sotherton is marked as much by *The Quarterly Reviews* provided for the amusement of their guests as by Rushworth's yen for landscape 'improvement' (MP, 104). Far more respectful of the reviews is Maria Edgeworth, who judges the development of Ireland's culture by the reviews' circulation rates. She recounts the following anecdote:

About the year 1783 or 1784, my father happened to be present in the only great bookseller's shop then in Dublin, when a cargo of new books from London arrived, and among them, the Reviews, or *the Review*, for the Monthly Review was the only one then sufficiently in circulation, to make its way to Ireland. Of these, my father found on inquiry, that not above a dozen, or twenty at the utmost, were ordered in this island. I am informed, that more than two thousand Reviews are now taken regularly. This may give some measure of the general increase of our taste for literature. *The Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* are now to be found in the houses of most of our principal farmers: and all therein contained, and the positive, comparative, and superlative merits and demerits of Scott, Campbell, and Lord Byron, are now as common table and tea-table talk here, as in any part of the United Empire.<sup>100</sup>

It is important to recognise that the popularity and pre-eminence of the reviews did not burst upon English-language literary culture one morning in October 1802 with the publication of the first issue of *The Edinburgh*. Eighteenth-century engagement with literature, fiction and non-fiction, was characterised by the critical impulses of the Enlightenment. Literary criticism, especially of fiction, poetry and other 'polite' literature, was central to the discussions taking place in salons and drawing rooms across Europe. The role which women played in this development of critical practices has

long been misunderstood and downplayed, but is now being recognised as crucial.<sup>101</sup>

A point made by the Folger Collective on Early Women Critics is worth noting: 'even feminist reconstructions of the eighteenth century ally women with novels and novel criticism in a way that has obscured the wealth of their attention to other genres'. Novel criticism, of course, held particular attractions for women. 'Like men of the period', the Folger Collective argues, 'women critics are preoccupied with questions of genre. Sometimes they inaugurate woman-centered inquiries, particularly in their criticism of the novel: as a form not yet sanctioned by tradition, the novel offered a place for women to participate in the very definition of a genre.'<sup>102</sup> Mary Waters argues cogently for viewing Romantic-era critical culture as one in which both men and women participated. She writes that '[w]omen literary critics are not peripheral to British Romanticism. They are instead centrally constructive, making a significant, if at times behind the scenes, formative contribution.'<sup>103</sup> Along with their male peers, they contributed to what critics such as Claudia Johnson, Franco Moretti and Lawrence Lipking have claimed was a nationalist project of making *British* literature.<sup>104</sup> Waters argues that women literary critics 'made numerous contributions to establishing and revising the newly emerging literary canon, and to creating the literary values that made it possible to identify and celebrate a native British literary heritage at one of the most divisive moments in British history'. Indeed, literary production and criticism became one of the few areas in which women could participate in the evolving concept of nationhood in the Romantic period. 'Disenfranchised, blocked from traditional channels of power on the basis of gender, class, and community', as Waters writes, women critics nevertheless 'found themselves in a position to speak to large numbers of the British literate middle class on a topic of utmost public importance – the nation's cultural heritage, and through that heritage, its very identity'. Waters further argues that this was a conscious act on the part of women critics, who understand that 'what they are writing carries implications that extend well beyond the book at hand'.<sup>105</sup> From Barbauld on poetry and the novel, to Elizabeth Inchbald on drama, and Mary Wollstonecraft on political essays and gothic fiction: women produced some of the most important criticism of literature during the period which itself gave birth to the modern idea of literary criticism.

Throughout this book I use the term 'criticism' in its broadest sense, including (but not limited to) its normal contemporary meaning of the theory and evaluation of literature. As Simon Jarvis writes,

Only at certain times, and in certain places, has 'criticism', as it now does, primarily designated *literary* criticism. Between 1740 and 1830 the term's meanings are complex, for a number of reasons. Not only did *literature* only by the end of this period come to refer chiefly to works of invention,

rather than to a much wider range of the products of the world of letters; but *criticism* bore a number of more specific senses, all of which in various ways and to various extents interacted with and informed the criticism of invented texts ... Criticism, then, is not a genre, nor even a name for a group of genres. It happens not only in essays, reviews, philosophical dialogues, lecture courses, treatises; but also in novels, epigrams, plays and theatrical prologues and epilogues, long poems, editions of texts, conversations, duels, gardens.<sup>106</sup>

Despite this proliferation of critical media, most of the work of criticism in the period begins, as it does today, with the reading and assessment of texts. At the centre of this study is Jane Austen's reading career, and the work that she performed in her criticism of what she read. I shall argue throughout this book that it is through her critical reading that Austen produced her creative contribution to the novel.

Jacqueline Pearson, writing about the resistant, often villain-identifying readers within Austen's fiction – and Austen's own marginal addition (in killing off Dr Marchmont) to Frances Burney's *Camilla* – argues that such resistance 'resembles Harold Bloom's view of the development of literature from one "strong" writer to another through fruitful misreadings'.<sup>107</sup> Bloom is explicit in making a distinction between criticism and his concept of poetic influence, which he defines as springing from 'misreading ... an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation', and Austen's practice does not resemble what he calls the *clinamen*, or misinterpretative swerve.<sup>108</sup> This is partly because Austen is in a very different position to the Romantic poets who are the major subject of Bloom's study. Her critical readings are just as important as her creative contributions in developing, establishing and remaking the genre of the novel. Austen was not alone in performing critical work. She is joined by many contemporaries who begin to read, and to write, in a manner we can see as critical, with respect both to novels and to other genres.

It is clear that in the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, women had acted and continued to act as critics of all literary genres. Women's prominent role in *writing* novels, however, along with the persistent assumption that they composed the novel's principal audience, make their critical responses to the genre significant for our understanding not only of the genre's development, but also of the construction of women's own attitudes to their society in the period. Austen, whose broad-ranging literary interests extended from poetry to history to political philosophy, maintained throughout her literary career her early preoccupation with the novel.

## 2

### What's Not in Austen?:<sup>1</sup> Critical Quixotry in 'Love and Freindship' and *Northanger Abbey*

Of all the multifarious productions which the efforts of superior genius, or the labours of scholastic industry, have crowded upon the world, none are perused with more insatiable avidity, or disseminated with more universal applause, than the narrations of feigned events, descriptions of imaginary scenes, and delineations of ideal characters. The celebrity of other authors is confined within very narrow limits ... To the writer of fiction alone every ear is open, and every tongue lavish of applause; curiosity sparkles in every eye, and every bosom is throbbing with concern.

– Anna Laetitia Barbauld<sup>2</sup>

The appetite for fiction is indeed universal, and has unfortunately been made the occasion of conveying poison of every description into the youthful mind.

– Mary Brunton<sup>3</sup>

A Novel is the only thing to teach a girl life, and the way of the world, and elegant fancies, and love to the end of the chapter ... if it was not for Novels and Love-letters, a girl would have no use for her writing and reading.

– George Colman<sup>4</sup>

'Where Edward in the name of wonder (said he) did you pick up this unmeaning Gibberish? You have been studying Novels I suspect.'

(MW, 81)

The first critics and theorists of the novel were, of course, novelists themselves. In their dedications and prefaces, they advertised and (often

simultaneously) apologised for their work, in the process gradually developing a vocabulary for defining and discussing the genre. As Joseph Bartolomeo points out, such paratextual commentary by authors is often disingenuous. In novels 'the fictionalising that is essential to the text can be – and often is – present in the preface as well ... the assertions of the preface may be no more true than the characters and events in the novel'.<sup>5</sup> Daniel Defoe who, like many early novelists, decries the prevalence of fiction while protesting the veracity of his own text, nevertheless presents his claims in the marketable language of novels in justifying his 'new dressing up this Story'. He begins *Moll Flanders* with the following complaint:

The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine, where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed, and on this Account we must be content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as he pleases.

The Author is here suppos'd to be writing her own History ... It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words ... The Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read.<sup>6</sup>

The problematic nature of the text is foregrounded before it has even begun. The 'Author' is only to be 'suppos'd' to be 'writing' the text – the anonymous, anthropomorphised 'Pen' has clearly done more than merely 'finish' the story. This ungendered 'Pen' has the power to make Moll 'tell her own Tale' in the words it chooses: the 'Pen' has true authority. In addition, despite Defoe's objections to 'Novels and Romances', he advertises his 'Genuine' 'History' in the language of picaresque novels, a genre in which a 'Life of continu'd Variety' is not an improbability, but an expected, essential generic attribute.

Defoe's preface to *Moll Flanders* illuminates the chief concern of critics of the novel from the eighteenth century through to the twentieth, the problem called variously *mimesis*, genuineness, verisimilitude, probability and (ultimately) realism. Any story we tell about the 'birth' of the novel as a genre must take into account the concept of realism, if only because this is the discourse through which countless early novelists explain their art. Ian Watt, whose account of the 'rise of the novel' begins with the concept of realism, writes that in the mid-eighteenth century, 'Richardson and Fielding saw themselves as founders of a new kind of writing, and ... both viewed their work as involving a break with the old-fashioned romances', but Watt ignores the fact that this is the same attitude shared

by writers at the beginning of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries too.<sup>7</sup> Joan Ramon Resina explains Cervantes's use of the term *historia* to define his *Don Quixote*, a term which has implications for our understanding of Defoe's argument that *Moll Flanders* is a 'History'. Even Cervantes's concept of the *historia*, however, is grounded in the literary criticism of his age, as Resina writes:

Cervantes made much of the equivocal meaning of *historia*. The ambiguity allowed him to play off fantasy against verisimilitude, the chief criterion of poetic merit in Alonso López Pinciano's *Philosophía antigua poética* (1596). In this matter Pinciano followed the opinion of other humanists. Earlier, Juan de Valdés had written in his *Diálogo de la lengua*: '... those who write lies must write them in such a way that they come close to the truth. Proceeding in this way they will be able to sell their lies as if they were truths'.<sup>8</sup>

As the knight of La Mancha says himself, 'all fabulous histories are so far good and entertaining, as they come near the truth, or the resemblance of it; and true histories themselves are so much the better, by how much the truer'.<sup>9</sup> 'Truth', it turns out, is not nearly so important to the novel as the *resemblance* of truth: realism is not 'real', but merely a 'reality effect', as Resina writes, in which 'the quotidian displaces the miraculous'.<sup>10</sup> Two hundred years after *Don Quixote*, Austen offers – in her criticism of a work-in-progress by an aspiring novelist (her niece) – an example of realism in practice:

I have scratched out Sir Tho: from walking with the other Men to the Stables &c the very day after his breaking his arm – for though I find your Papa did walk out immediately after his arm was set, I think it can be so little usual as to appear unnatural in a book. (*L*, 280)

The *appearance* of reality is, 'in a book', more important than fidelity to actual historical reality.

Even a cursory glance through early criticism of the novel demonstrates that realism is central to the novel's definition, but also that every generation of novel writers and readers considers the realism of its own fiction superior – that is, more *real* – to that of the past. In this way, romances are always conceived of as being 'old-fashioned', whereas the novel continuously reiterates its novelty. Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Delarivier Manley, like Cervantes, characterises writers of this new form as 'historians', and declares that the historian 'ought with great care to observe the probability of truth, which consists in saying nothing but what may be morally believed', despite the fact that 'there are truths that are not always probable'.<sup>11</sup> We have seen already that Congreve thinks that,

unlike romances, 'Novels are of a more familiar nature' and that they 'come near us'.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to recognise how early, and how consistently, writers identify their fiction, and the fiction of their contemporaries, as novels, or (what amounts to much the same thing) as realistic, at the same time categorising the fiction of the past as improbable romances. This is the context in which we should read Johnson's *Rambler* No. 4. Johnson congratulates himself that the 'works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind'. The 'province' of this kind of writing, he continues,

is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder: it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles.

Johnson, much like critics before and after him, is disparaging of the taste of previous generations of readers. He writes that 'almost all the fictions of the last age will vanish, if you deprive them of a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck', and concludes that 'it is not easy to conceive' why 'this wild strain of imagination found reception so long, in polite and learned ages'.<sup>13</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, another author's attempt to define the triumphs of his contemporary novelists against those of Johnson's day replicates *The Rambler* essay's imagery almost exactly. Austen's novels, writes Walter Scott, 'belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel'. The typical novel that flourished under these 'former rules', as Scott conceives of it, closely resembles the typical 'heroic romance' of Johnson's essay:

The heroine was usually condemned to equal hardship and hazards. She was regularly exposed to being forcibly carried off like a Sabine virgin by some frantic admirer. And even if she escaped the terrors of masked ruffians, an insidious ravisher, a cloak wrapped forcibly around her head, and a coach with the blinds up driving she could not conjecture whither, she had still her share of wandering, of poverty, of obloquy, of seclusion, and of imprisonment, and was frequently extended upon a bed of sickness, and reduced to her last shilling before the author condescended to shield her from persecution.

In their analysis of plot, both Johnson and Scott praise the 'new' novel for its probability, even banality. Their analysis of characterisation also demonstrates that despite claims to innovation, critical concepts persist over time. 'He who paints from *le beau idéal*,' writes Scott,

if his scenes and sentiments are striking and interesting, is in a great measure exempted from the difficult task of reconciling them with the ordinary probabilities of life: but he who paints a scene of common occurrence, places his composition within that extensive range of criticism which general experience offers to every reader. The resemblance of a statue of Hercules we must take on the artist's judgment; but every one can criticize that which is presented as the portrait of a friend, or neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

This is exactly the same difficulty facing Johnson's model novelist who, Johnson writes, is 'engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance. Other writings are safe, except from the malice of learning, but these are in danger from every common reader.'<sup>15</sup>

A complicating factor in the novel's ongoing labour for realism is the contradictory pull to create moral fiction. Especially while the novel is seen as a literary form of dubious merit, its ability to portray and inculcate morality is its greatest – and at times its only – claim to legitimate existence. In this it participated in an ancient debate seeking to justify the propagation of what might be generally classed as moral untruths. As early as Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, the moral benefits of fiction were claimed as outweighing the drawbacks of countenancing such falsehoods in the face of the biblical commandment not to bear false witness.<sup>16</sup> Comparing 'the poet with the historian and with the moral philosopher', Sidney writes, demonstrates the poet's superiority in moral teaching. While the philosopher is too 'abstract and general' to be understood, or for their ideas to be applied to real life, the historian 'is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine'. The 'peerless poet', however, or in later times the novelist who is equally dependent on fabrication, is able to employ the utility of history, without losing any moral force to the constraints of historical accuracy.<sup>17</sup> Unlike history, in which crime (among other ethical shortcomings) often pays, writers of fiction are able to manipulate events to suit their morality. Sidney's ideas – along with the anxieties that prompted them – remained current in the late eighteenth century. In her preface to *The Old English Baron*, Clara Reeve laments that 'History represents human nature as it is in real life; – alas, too often a melancholy retrospect!' It is the 'business' of fiction, she continues, 'first, to excite the attention; and secondly, to direct it to some

useful, or at least innocent, end'.<sup>18</sup> As Miss Prism remarks over one hundred years later, 'the good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.'<sup>19</sup>

That the earliest novelists each saw this kind of morally inflected realism as both an achievement and a requirement of their new genre is clear from their own critical commentary. The necessity to make the real conform to the moral and artistic needs of the novel, however, placed strain on the texts themselves. The fact that novelistic realism is not reality, but rather an invention which seeks to approximate reality, presents a puzzle to a number of authors. This dilemma threatened to tear the young genre to pieces. By analysing the problem, however, authors produced a subgenre of fiction essential to Austen's art, and to the development of the novel as a literary form. The hero of this peculiarly novelistic triumph is Don Quixote de la Mancha.

The quixote novel, and ultimately the figure of the quixotic hero or heroine, engages in a Laocoönian struggle between the competing tendencies of romance and novelistic realism. Although part of the convention governing this popular subgenre is to insist that the quixotic figure come to a realisation of their imaginative, 'romantic' delusions, this rationalising, disciplinary effect is inevitably undermined by both the compelling nature of the delusion, and by the entire process being acted out in fiction. All that the quixote figure can learn is, after all, to behave like a character in a novel, rather than one in a romance.

Cervantes's hero was a dominant literary figure in England long before Smollett's well-known translation from the Spanish was published in 1755. The first English translation of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, by Thomas Shelton, appeared in 1612.<sup>20</sup> Tristram Shandy frequently refers to the early novel, calling Don Quixote 'the peerless knight of *La Mancha*, whom, by the bye, with all his follies, I love more, and would actually have gone further to have paid a visit to, than the greatest hero of antiquity'.<sup>21</sup> His popularity persisted through the Romantic period, as did his usefulness as an archetype of the reader. William Hazlitt wrote that the knight 'presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to the imagination than any other hero upon record ... There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider Don Quixote as a merely satirical work.'<sup>22</sup> He is the novel-reader's true representative. Bakhtin writes of the genre:

We can experience these adventures, identify with these heroes; ... novels almost become a substitute for our own lives ...

And here we encounter the specific danger inherent in the novelistic zone of contact: we ourselves may actually enter the novel (whereas we could never enter an epic or other distanced genre). It follows that we might substitute for our own life an obsessive reading of novels, or dreams based on novelistic models.<sup>23</sup>

That is, that we might become quixotes ourselves.

Don Quixote, who 'gave himself up to the reading of books of chivalry, with so much attachment and relish that he almost forgot ... even the management of his domestic affairs', was often held up as a pattern for the eighteenth-century anxiety over women's reading, and particularly women's novel-reading.<sup>24</sup> This is made obvious in Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*, where the heroine Arabella is, like Don Quixote, convinced of the historical truth and current reality of the romances she loves, and – to the amusement of those around her – frames her own experiences in the romances' highly conventional terms. Carlos Fuentes writes that 'Don Quixote wants to introduce the whole world within his readings,' and Arabella interprets the world of her novel as if it were a romance.<sup>25</sup> *The Female Quixote* is part of a dedicated subgenre of quixote fictions – J. M. S. Tompkins notes at least seven novels from the late eighteenth century with 'Quixote' in their titles, and novels like Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine, or Adventures of Cherubina* (1813) demonstrate that not all quixote fictions ostensibly identified themselves as such.<sup>26</sup> A heroine who is brought into danger by too much reading, or the wrong kind of reading, as Ann Jones points out, was 'one of the most hackneyed situations in the novel of this period'.<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Pearson writes that

there was hardly any crime, sin, or personal catastrophe that injudicious reading was not held to cause directly or indirectly – from murder, suicide, rape and violent revolution, through prostitution, adultery and divorce, to pride, vanity and slapdash housewifery. In particular, criticism of women's reading became highly sexualised, sexual transgression being repeatedly figured by unwise reading.<sup>28</sup>

Quixotic characters occasionally make cameo appearances in novels with otherwise non-quixotic protagonists. In Mary Brunton's *Self Control* (1810), the dual concepts of *character* – that is, moral and intellectual attributes on the one hand, and fictional people on the other – are briefly interrogated, through the minor character Julia. 'Having no character of her own,' writes Brunton,

Julia was always, as nearly as she was able, the heroine whom her last read novel inclined her to personate ... After reading *Evelina*, she sat with her mouth extended in a perpetual smile, and was so very timid, that she would not for the world have looked at a stranger. When *Camilla* was the model for the day, she became insufferably rattling, infantine, and thoughtless.

In 'an evil hour', Julia finds 'a volume of the *Nouvelle Eloise*, which had before disturbed many a wiser head', and she returns 'with renewed *impetus*

to the sentimental'. Like most ancillary young, female characters in the novel of this period, Julia exists principally to be contrasted with Laura, the novel's perfect heroine, who, of course, shares none of Julia's faults, and has not even read *Tom Jones*. Julia has forsaken 'the guidance of nature', but the reader is left with the overwhelming feeling that true heroines are born, not made.<sup>29</sup>

One such born heroine is Austen's Laura, from 'Love and Freindship'. Born in Spain, educated 'at a Convent in France', and residing at the story's opening under her 'paternal roof', a 'mansion ... situated in one of the most romantic parts of the Vale of Uske', Laura is 'beautiful', mistress of 'every accomplishment accustomary to my sex', and possessed of a mind that is 'the Rendezvous of every good Quality & of every noble sentiment' (MW, 77–8). 'Love and Freindship', the best-known story from Austen's juvenilia, has evidence of some early literary preoccupations that influenced Austen's writing throughout her career. Subtitled 'a novel in a series of letters', the story is essentially a first-person narration masquerading as an epistolary novel. It is as readily quotable as any of the mature novels: the instruction 'Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint,' may well be the only clear moral to emerge from the juvenilia (MW, 102).

The story's principal engagement is with sentimental fiction, but this engagement is more complex than many critics suggest. Many of the critical readings of 'Love and Freindship' dwell on the story's function as a parody of the novel of sentiment and sensibility, and also on its relationship to *Sense and Sensibility*. Deborah Knuth, for instance, writes that Marianne Dashwood 'displays an excessive sentimentality quite reminiscent of Laura and Sophia', while Juliet McMaster's chart of the sensibility gene running through the story's families emphasises what she calls the 'major thematic oppositions' of sense and sensibility.<sup>30</sup>

Claudia Johnson, however, rightly cautions against construing the story as evidence of Austen's approval of either 'sense' or 'sensibility'. She writes:

It is important that we see Austen's early work as exercises in stylistic and generic self-consciousness and not principally as expressions of personal belief ... Austen's parody, here as elsewhere, is never so essentially prescriptive nor so unitary. 'Love and Freindship' parodies the destinies inscribed by sentimental fiction, not the perniciousness of sentiment, and to overlook this layer of detachment in the sketch is to miss many of its most hilarious jokes.<sup>31</sup>

In their reading of 'Love and Freindship', Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the 'hypocritical jargon' of romantic fictions masks their 'materialistic and libidinal egoism', and that the characters in Austen's story, leading 'lives regulated by the rules provided by popular fiction ... prove only how very bankrupt that fiction is'.<sup>32</sup> In 'Love and Freindship' this

is manifested to an even greater extent by the actions of Gustavus and Philander, whose unrepentant theft causes the starvation deaths of both their mothers. Laura and Sophia similarly participate in criminal activity while staying at the house of Sophia's relation, Macdonald:

Sophia happening one Day to open a private Drawer in Macdonald's Library with one of her own keys, discovered that it was the Place where he kept his Papers of consequence & amongst them some bank notes of considerable amount. This discovery she imparted to me; and having agreed together that it would be a proper treatment of so vile a Wretch as Macdonald to deprive him of money, perhaps dishonestly gained, it was determined that the next time we should either of us happen to go that way, we would take one or more of the Bank notes from the drawer. (MW, 95–6)

Laura's obsession with sensibility here provides excellent justification for their theft. By calling Macdonald a 'Wretch', she completes the transformation of him into a villain, begun when he failed 'to bestow one curse' on the 'vindictive Stars' of Laura and Sophia, and increased when he was found to be father (and, therefore, tyrant) to one possessed of a 'natural noble Sensibility' (MW, 93). As the narrator of 'Love and Freindship', Laura actively *character*-ises those she meets: that is, she turns them into characters in the story she is constructing, however improbably they answer her wants. This parodic technique allowed the young Austen to treat a great deal of proscribed subject matter.

Reading scenes of violence, crime and taboo sexuality in 'Love and Freindship' it is easy to remember, as Virginia Woolf writes, that when Austen was composing the juvenilia, the 'eighteenth century, of course, still persisted. The little Austens had the freedom of the house as no other children [of the middle classes, in any case] were to have it for a century at least.'<sup>33</sup> As a child, Austen does not appear to have suffered from the same gendered restrictions that led Charles and Mary Lamb to observe in 1807 that boys are 'generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls', and are likely to be familiar with 'manly' literature long before 'their sisters are permitted to look' into such works.<sup>34</sup> Austen's juvenilia registers not only her love and profound understanding of her wide reading but also her delight in its more ridiculous and risqué aspects.

'Love and Freindship' owes many of its phrases, situations and even the names of its characters to the novels, poetry and plays in which the young novelist was imaginatively immersed. It belongs chiefly, however, to the long tradition of quixote novels mentioned above. Rachel Brownstein extends this debt to other stories of the juvenilia, arguing that much of Austen's 'juvenile writing insists, as Charlotte Lennox does following Cervantes, on the crude and ordinary facts of life that show up the absurdities of romance

and its modern variant, genteel fiction'.<sup>35</sup> In 'Love and Freindship', however, Austen's treatment of the quixotic heroine departs from Lennox and her ilk in significant ways.

When reading 'Love and Freindship', it is important to remember that quixote fictions of this period are inevitably disciplinary in intention, and they commonly treat their delusional characters very severely. They do so, however, in the context of another fiction. This renders their ostensibly anti-fictional – or at least anti-romantic – messages rather dubious, as they ask their readers and audiences to suspend disbelief at the same time as chastising a character for his or her excessive or otherwise inappropriate suspension of disbelief. Part of the problem seems to lie in the continuing tension between the romance and novel forms. To revisit Clara Reeve's definition:

The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. – The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; *and the perfection of it*, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as *to deceive us into a persuasion* (at least while we are reading) *that all is real*, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own. (My emphasis)<sup>36</sup>

It is sometimes all too easy, when reading novels, to be 'deceived' into a 'persuasion' that what we are reading is 'real'. According to Reeve's definition, a novel reaches 'perfection' when it turns all its readers into quixotes. The realism which Austen began to develop in her juvenilia is highly successful at deceiving its readers in this way, but it is essential to recognise that Austen herself was never deceived.

Austen's profound understanding that the novel of sense and the novel of sensibility were equally fictions is clearly demonstrated in 'Love and Freindship'. Many critics have committed the error of believing that Laura's sentimental, romantic viewpoint is contrasted within the story with another, 'real' viewpoint – that is, with 'sense'.<sup>37</sup> Laura's way of envisioning and – by means of her letters – writing her world is certainly dictated by her quixotic 'sensibility'. The reader, however, can make a distinction between those things which Laura makes happen because of her imaginative sensibility, such as Janetta's elopement, and those things which occur independently of Laura's sensibility, such as the burlesqued Mackenzie-style recognition scene between the four suddenly reunited cousins and their grandfather. By blurring the boundaries of probability in the story, Austen prevents her reader from making neat distinctions between what is 'real' and what is romantic. The sensible Sir Edward, providing the epigraph for this chapter, cries out against his son's quixotic nonsense: 'Where Edward in the

name of wonder (said he) did you pick up this unmeaning Gibberish? You have been studying Novels I suspect,' but in the final letter, Sir Edward is revealed to be the very character snoring away in the stagecoach of novelistic convention, along with the jilted Lady Dorothea and the rest of Laura's surviving acquaintance (MW, 81).<sup>38</sup>

The stagecoach scene is the last in a series of clues that Austen provides her readers to alert them to the layers of fiction in 'Love and Freindship'. From the story's beginning, the reader is invited to question the existence of a clear distinction between perspectives of sense and of sensibility, of realism and romance. While much of the parody in 'Love and Freindship' is not aimed at any particular sentimental novel, its opening and much of its plot has a clear literary antecedent, bearing close resemblance to that of *The Recess*, Sophia Lee's quasi-historical novel, published between 1783 and 1785. *The Recess* contains the repeated phrase 'love and friendship', and like 'Love and Freindship', Lee's novel is composed as a letter by an aged heroine, relating her life story to a young friend (*Recess*, 2: 59; see also 3: 172). The narrator/heroine Matilda begins the tale with the following unintentionally hilarious address:

After a long and painful journey thro' life, with a heart exhausted by various afflictions, and eyes which can no longer supply tears to lament them, I turn my every thought toward that grave on the verge of which I hover. Oh! why then, too generous friend, require me to live over my misfortunes? ... Alas! your partial affection demands a memorial which calls back to being all the sad images buried in my bosom, and opens anew every vein of my heart. Yet consummate misery has a moral use, and if ever these sheets reach the publick, let the repiner at little evils learn to be juster to his God and himself, by unavoidable comparison. But am I not assuming an insolent consequence in thus admonishing? Alas, it is the dear-bought privilege of the unfortunate to be tedious! (*Recess*, 1: 1–2)

In Austen's parody, this opening is divided into letters between two characters, Laura and Isabel. It is Isabel who writes of her 'repeated intreaties' for a 'regular detail of the Misfortunes and Adventures' of Laura's life and Laura complies so as 'to avoid the imputation of Obstinacy or ill-nature' (MW, 76–7).

'Love and Freindship' resembles *The Recess* in many other ways, for instance Laura's description of society in the 'Vale of Uske' – 'Our neighbourhood was small, for it consisted only of your mother' – parodies Matilda's characterisation of her protector in the recess: 'She was our world, and all the tender affections, of which I have since proved my heart so full, center'd in her' (MW, 78; *Recess*, 1: 5). Edward's irrational refusal of Lady Dorothea, whom he finds 'lovely and Engaging', but scorns to marry in

compliance with his father's wishes, is a parody of the predicament faced by the Earl of Leicester in *The Recess*. Enjoying his position as Queen Elizabeth's favourite he rejects the young woman proposed to him by his dying guardian sight unseen, as it were, and upon finally seeing her is horrified to realise that he had 'refused, and in refusing insulted the woman on whom my happiness must depend' (*Recess*, 1: 125–6). The most compelling argument for the debt which 'Love and Freindship' owes *The Recess* is the fate of that novel's twin heroines. The story is structured around these sisters' unrelieved misfortunes, as they 'dispute the woeful pre-eminence' of their 'infiictions' (*Recess*, 3: 21).

Ellinor, who is tricked into marriage to a contemptible man while her beloved marries another, does in fact run mad. The remainder of her short life is characterised by periods of lucidity, exertion and opportunistic transvestism followed by relapses into madness whenever the prospects of her future happiness are blighted (a frequent occurrence). Her sister Matilda retains her sanity, but her habitual fainting has damaging results. Saved from an unwanted marriage to a French owner of Jamaican plantations by the revolt of his slaves, she is witness to their resulting massacre. As she is dragged off to prison Matilda realises her error:

Racked with intolerable pains through all my limbs, I was sensible, too late, that my own imprudence had added a malady of body to all my mental sufferings. During the last awful conflict, when the offending rebels expiated with life the ravages they had committed, I, in common with the females they had left behind, had thrown myself on the damp ground, alike through weariness and terror. The un-wholesome chills from a spot which yet the sun never penetrated, stiffened every joint; a rheumatic fever was the cruel consequence. (*Recess*, 2: 129)

The fever and her subsequent eight-year confinement in a Jamaican prison cell render Matilda lame. This, however, is far from being the worst of her misfortunes. The novel's utter ridiculousness lies not nearly so much in the licence it takes with the lives of well-known Elizabethans, but in the unrelenting trauma to which Lee exposes her central characters. Even Matilda feels it necessary to justify her continued existence under the weight of so much adversity. 'You will be astonished', she writes,

at my surviving such unceasing complicated misfortunes, and, above all, the loss of my beloved. I regard it myself with wonder, and impute my strength both of body and mind solely to the knowing no pause in my sufferings. Driven from one fatigue to another, from one agony to another, lamentation was continually suspended either by amazement, or that necessity for exertion which gives a spring to all but the weakest minds, and counteracts despondency. Grief, I may affirm from sad

experience, cannot be fatal till it stills and condenses every other passion. (*Recess*, 2: 76–7)

Further connections between Lee's novel and Austen's story produce parody at a broader level. The reader is expected to concur with Matilda's statement that she is marked out 'a solitary victim to the crimes of my progenitors: For surely I could never merit by my own the misery of living as I have done – of dying as I must do' (*Recess*, 1: 2). The chief source of the parody in 'Love and Freindship' derives from Laura's similar comment that her 'Conduct' has been 'faultless ... during the whole Course of my late Misfortunes & Adventures' – a statement that is transparently contradicted by her preceding narrative (*MW*, 104).

This unlikely self-approration characterises Laura's retelling of her history within the narrative itself. This occurs in a stagecoach where the story's surviving characters are assembled. Laura tells her fellow cast members

Of the imprisonment of Augustus & the absence of Edward – of our arrival in Scotland – of our unexpected Meeting with our Grandfather and our cousins – of our visit to Macdonald-Hall – of the singular Service we there performed towards Janetta – of her Fathers ingratitude for it ..... of his inhuman Behaviour, unaccountable suspicions, & barbarous treatment of us, in obliging us to leave the House ..... of our Lamentations on the loss of Edward & Augustus & finally of the melancholy Death of my beloved Companion. (*MW*, 104, Austen's ellipses)

The comedy of this scene lies in its parody of what a twenty-first-century reader might think of as an intervention. Whereas Don Quixote, returning home bruised after his first adventure, is set upon by his housekeeper and niece, the local curate and the barber, who together determine to burn his books of chivalry in an attempt to destroy the cause of his malady, Laura is listened to with only the silent reproach of Isabel's countenance, and finally rewarded at the end of her narration by Sir Edward with an annuity of four hundred pounds.

The reason for this reversal of the usual fate of quixotic heroes and heroines is less due to Laura than it is to the other characters in 'Love and Freindship'. Sir Edward, Augusta, Isabel, Lady Dorothea, Philippa, her husband, Philander and Gustavus have not assembled in the stagecoach in order to meet and chastise Laura. As Augusta says, 'it would certainly have been much more agreeable to us, to visit the Highlands in a Postchaise than merely to travel from Edinburgh to Sterling & from Sterling to Edinburgh every other Day in a crouded & uncomfortable Stage' (*MW*, 105). As ridiculous as is the very idea of a Sir Edward's or a Lady Dorothea's appearance in a stagecoach, they and the other characters are there for the very reason that they *are* characters. Despite Sir Edward's blustering about 'studying

Novels', he himself is actually *in* a novel, and this – coincidentally joining with the entire surviving population of a story in order to clumsily tie up loose ends – is exactly the kind of thing that happens in novels (MW, 81).<sup>39</sup> What 'Love and Freindship' shows is that Austen, while keenly aware of the ridiculously unnatural aspects of sentimental fiction, was also insistent on the fictionality of those texts which purport to 'exhibit life in its true state'.<sup>40</sup>

'Love and Freindship' artfully demonstrates the spurious claims of more dedicatedly realistic novels against the ills of romantic sentimentality by gradually revealing the utterly fictitious nature of both and denying the possibility of representing 'real life and manners' in a work of fiction. In this early work, Austen presages one of her most significant and politically charged artistic achievements. She shows that she accepts, to a degree, the distinction between the romance and the novel, and cleaves to the latter as her 'dear D<sup>r</sup> Johnson' would have her do (*L*, 126). Departing from Johnson, however, she is unswervingly conscious of the fictionality of fiction – the gulf between real life and what is represented as real in novels – and she persistently challenges her readers *not* to suspend disbelief, even as she fabricates a world that even accomplished readers confuse with an unmediated historical reality.

Austen persisted in building her novels out of the parodied remains of other fiction throughout her career. Like 'Love and Freindship', Austen's later novel *Northanger Abbey* (1818) makes explicit its parody of a particular subgenre of the contemporary novel: in *Northanger Abbey's* case, the gothic novel, which from the 1790s was incorporating the tropes of sentimental fiction. Often this parody is recognisable when, as with 'Love and Freindship' and *The Recess*, episodes from older novels appear – with varied levels of disguise – in Austen's writing. For example, one of the few scenes from gothic fiction parodied in *Northanger Abbey* has its antecedents in both Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). On her first night at Northanger, Catherine Morland, already primed by Henry Tilney for 'a gloomy chamber ... undoubtedly haunted', comically enacts the gothic scene that the combined tales of Reeve, Radcliffe and Henry have led her to expect (*NA*, 158–9).<sup>41</sup> Alone in her bedchamber, having investigated a 'cabinet ... mysteriously closed', Catherine

seized, with an unsteady hand, the precious manuscript, for half a glance sufficed to ascertain written characters; and while she acknowledged with awful sensations this striking exemplification of what Henry had foretold, resolved instantly to peruse every line before she attempted to rest.

Catherine next accidentally extinguishes her candle. 'A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. Catherine, for a few moments, was

motionless with horror ... Darkness impenetrable and immoveable filled the room' (NA, 168–70). Edmund, the hero of *The Old English Baron*, has a similar experience:

He then took a survey of his chamber; the furniture, by long neglect, was decayed and dropping to pieces ... There were two doors on the further side of the room with keys in them; being not at all sleepy, he resolved to examine them; ... the key was rusted into the lock, and resisted his attempts; he set the lamp on the ground, and exerting all his strength opened the door, and at the same instant the wind of it blew out the lamp and left him in utter darkness ... Till this moment not one idea of fear had approached the mind of Edmund; but just then, all the concurrent circumstances of his situation struck upon his heart, and gave him a new and disagreeable sensation.<sup>42</sup>

In *The Romance of the Forest*, the heroine Adeline likewise finds her bedroom in a long-abandoned abbey a source of unease. Discovering a door concealed behind a tapestry, Adeline says to herself, 'A mystery seems to hang over these chambers ... which it is, perhaps, my lot to develop; I will, at least, see to what that door leads.'<sup>43</sup> Adeline retrieves a manuscript from one of the concealed rooms, one which proves altogether more interesting than the discarded laundry list found by Catherine Morland.

There is no need to rehearse the numerous critical accounts of *Northanger Abbey's* gothic parody. While Henry Tilney plays up to the possibility of gothic suspense for Catherine's benefit, there is in fact surprisingly little gothic quixotry in this novel – far less than might be expected for a full-blown parody of the gothic genre. This is partly due to Catherine's characterisation, and also to the broader nature of Austen's literary criticism in this novel.

Following her comments in the 'Advertisement' to *Northanger Abbey* that there are 'parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete' (NA, 10), critics have concluded that Austen's principal interest in the gothic genre was as a literary fad, and that the novel is primarily a response to Radcliffe's extraordinary popularity and widespread imitation.<sup>44</sup> Recent scholarship – particularly by feminists such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and queer theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and George Haggerty – has gone some way towards rehabilitating the literary reputation of gothic novels. Here I am concerned, however, with the function of the gothic novel in the context of late eighteenth-century criticism and novelistic theory. The gothic novel, like the earlier quixote novel, represented efforts to reconcile tensions within contemporary novelistic theory, and ultimately succeeded only in laying further stress on those flimsy foundations.

The gothic genre originated as an attempt to reconcile the romance with the novel – an endeavour that in itself is evidence for their estrangement

by the mid-eighteenth century, even when the descriptors 'novel' and 'romance' were still used interchangeably. In his preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole explains the project, first published anonymously but now acknowledged as his:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success ... The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability.<sup>45</sup>

Unsurprisingly, in light of her interest in the romance, Clara Reeve made her own attempt at Walpole's new genre: *The Champion of Virtue*, later revised as *The Old English Baron* (1778). Reeve calls her story 'the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern Novel'.<sup>46</sup> Reeve sets out to reduce the amount of implausible magic in her version of the gothic, in the process limiting the text's capacity for supernatural suspense. Ann Radcliffe's major innovation was to retain many of the exciting – at least to a late eighteenth-century readership – gothic accoutrements of Walpole, with an Enlightenment rationality that offered (mostly) plausible, realistic explanations for what had the appearance of magic and mystery.

Radcliffe was well received by contemporary critics. 'Mrs. Radcliffe's uncommon talent for exhibiting, with the picturesque touches of genius, the vague and horrid shapes which imagination bodies forth,' wrote Mary Wollstonecraft, 'has rendered her so deservedly celebrated, that any new work of hers must be peculiarly dear to curiosity and taste.' Wollstonecraft nevertheless maintained reservations about Radcliffe's narrative strategies: 'her mode ... of accounting in a natural manner for supernatural appearances, now the secret has gotten vent, lessens the effect', she writes, and the

nature of the story obliges us to digest improbabilities, and continually to recollect that it is a romance, not a novel, we are reading; especially as the restless curiosity it excites is excited too often by something like a stage trick – We are made to wonder, only to wonder.<sup>47</sup>

Wollstonecraft nevertheless recognised the potential for gothic tropes to serve novels with her radical political agenda, and in the unfinished *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria* (1798) deploys the trappings of the gothic genre to support her arguments against women's debilitating lack of legal status.

Her heroine is pursued not by a vengeful Montoni or lustful Marquis de Montalt, but by her own husband, and ultimately incarcerated not in a castle or nunnery, but in an English insane asylum. Wollstonecraft's project to invigorate and politicise the gothic genre was terminated by her death, but Charlotte Smith utilised gothic motifs in several of her politically inflected novels – particularly *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), *The Old Manor House* (1794) and *Montalbert* (1795) – with some success. Both Wollstonecraft and Smith attempt to harness the gothic for their political aims by departing from certain conventions while retaining others. Night-time scenes, pursuits, beleaguered heroines and scheming villains remain, while the Radcliffean gothic settings of Roman Catholic France and Italy in the late medieval/early modern period are transposed to contemporary, Protestant England.

In effect, Smith and Wollstonecraft were merely returning the gothic to its roots in the eighteenth-century sentimental novel, and stripping it of many of those elements which were drawn from Romance. After all, mid-eighteenth-century novels like Samuel Richardson's are in many respects the forerunners of Radcliffean gothic, and Smith's and Wollstonecraft's novels resemble Richardson's in significant ways. By repositioning their novels in contemporary England, Smith and Wollstonecraft were not only trying something new in gothic fiction, but also partly reclaiming some of the political potential possessed by the novel in the 1740s. By the revolutionary 1790s, publishing any political commentary – fictionalised or not – could be a very dangerous business. Novelists, like other writers in the Romantic period, were at risk from government persecution for promoting any material that could be construed as dissent. While there was no official censorship of the press during the period, the government had the support of the law courts in its attempts to repress criticism. 'The Attorney-General could charge any publisher on the strength of his own "*ex officio* information" (circumventing a grand jury)', explains William Christie, 'and arrest any publisher against whom "informations" were filed – proceedings often involving specially selected juries.' The government also went into league with private organisations such as the Association for Opposing the Progress of Disloyal and Seditious Principals to conduct 'systematic campaigns of prosecution'.<sup>48</sup> This political repression increased greatly after 1789, and had not improved by the end of Austen's life. In the meantime, canny novelists like Wollstonecraft, Smith and Austen used their knowledge of earlier texts, whose classic status was well established, in order to make coded political arguments.

It was a strategy liable to failure, however, if contemporary readers were unaware of their authors' sources, or simply did not recognise their political significance. Some episodes from Richardson's novels have clearly, by the end of the century, so thoroughly embedded themselves in novelistic culture that their reappearance under various new guises in Radcliffe's novels

go all but unnoticed (and presumably are unnoticed by Catherine Morland, who, unlike Austen, fails to make any connection between, for example, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and her mother's copy of *Sir Charles Grandison*). Scenes such as that at the Castle of Udolpho, where Emily hides in her insufficiently barricaded chamber while Montoni and his threatening troop of drunken, marauding comrades feast below, have their source in similar episodes in *Pamela* (1740), where even on her wedding night Pamela waits nervously alone upstairs, while Mr B. and his friends carouse in the dining room, and in *Clarissa* (1748), where the heroine is forced to act the part of Mrs Lovelace in a brothel, while entertaining Lovelace's crude, insulting friends.<sup>49</sup>

While Emily certainly seems the only one of these three heroines at serious risk of murder, the threat of rape (possibly gang-rape), other bodily harm, or insult, is present in each of the scenes. At the same time, Emily is trapped in a remote Italian alpine castle operating as a base of operations for banditti in the late sixteenth century, while Pamela and Clarissa are in Bedfordshire and London, respectively, living under the reign of George II. In his 'Life of Richardson' Scott complained, 'we are apt to blame Clarissa herself, who, in her escape to Hampstead, did not place herself under the guardianship of a magistrate'.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Scott, the novel-loving, slightly patronising pedant, begins to sound remarkably like Henry Tilney:

'Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians.'

This quotation marks the emotional and epistemological climax of the novel. Catherine is shamed by her admission of guilt in suspecting General Tilney of murdering his wife, and Henry sets her straight, admonishing Catherine of the 'horror' of what she has been imagining (NA, 197).

Catherine's mistake turns out to be the usual one of quixotic heroes and heroines: she has misunderstood what kind of novel she is in. Catherine's realisation is similar to that experienced by one of Radcliffe's repetitively disabused readers ('When will these discoveries end!' Elena exclaims in *The Italian*).<sup>51</sup> 'Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works,' Catherine thinks, miserably, to herself, 'and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for' (NA, 200). It is easy for a reader who shares some of Catherine's shame, or Henry Tilney's confident conservatism, to assume that *this* kind of novel, that is, the domestic, realist novel of the charming Miss Austen and her imitators, *is* the kind of book in which human nature is to be looked for. But to read the 'moral' of *Northanger Abbey* in this way is to misread it entirely, because Catherine turns out to be right.

Eventually, she learns 'enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (NA, 247).

In light of Catherine's actual, *a fortiori* discoveries of General Tilney's invidiousness, Henry's comments require rereading:

'If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to – Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?' (NA, 197–8)

Despite the stress typically laid on Catherine's quixotic delusion by readers of the novel, it is rarely acknowledged that her suspicion that General Tilney murdered his wife endures only from the end of the seventh to the end of the ninth chapter of the novel's second volume. In the time-scheme of the novel, Catherine first hears of Mrs Tilney's death on a Saturday, and is disabused of her misapprehensions on the following Monday afternoon. It is this speech of Henry's, and not Catherine's earlier quixotic suspicions or later realisations, that forms the critical crux of *Northanger Abbey*, raising its central literary concern. What on a first reading of this passage seem to be rhetorical questions, on revisiting it now appear to be genuine queries. What *have* we been judging from? Has our education prepared us to carry out, or to respond to, atrocities? Do laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without detection? These are questions which, Austen shows, the novel has so far no ability to answer, at least not in any straightforward way. Instead, it can only hint at an uneasy set of possibilities, of the other realities that have as yet no place in realist fiction.<sup>52</sup>

The quixote novel, like the gothic novel, has a history of raising uncomfortable questions in the minds of readers as to the nature of literary realism, and our own (and others') perceptions of reality. The quixote figure is an inherently threatening one – the reader who refuses to re-engage disbelief once she lays down the volume, who dares to actually *do* that which fiction offers everyone, and think of the world differently to the way the people around her think of it. As a result, quixote figures are usually roundly punished, preserving the status quo of a conservative

society. With Catherine's vindication, however – and as she had done once before in 'Love and Freindship' – Austen departs from the disciplinary conventions of the quixote novel. Unlike the frequently beaten and humiliated Don Quixote, or Lennox's quixotic heroine Arabella, who is subjected to a near drowning and then (adding trauma to trauma) preached at by a learned clergyman until she recognises and admits the errors of her reading, Austen suggests that Catherine has had the right idea all along.<sup>53</sup>

As in all manifestations of quixotism, Catherine's is the result of her inability to understand generic distinctions. Like the royal babes-in-the-world of Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), Catherine has not assimilated the set of received opinions touted as common sense. In her naïveté, Austen's unheroine-like heroine struggles to match her own spontaneous ideas to established patterns of thinking, such as the picturesque. ('If Henry had been with them indeed! – but now she should not know what was picturesque when she saw it' [NA, 177]). Austen's readers know at once that the 'something very shocking indeed ... more horrible than any thing we have met with yet' coming out of London is a new gothic novel, because there is no space for a mob uprising in the generic conventions of domestic fiction within which her novels are grounded (NA, 112).

The popular reception history of Austen's works tends to focus on these generic conventions, in a manner that makes Austen herself a symbol of a kind of prettified, proto-Victorian, myopic literary idyll, a writer who excludes everything that is messy or ungenteel from her pages. These exclusions have become the basis for parodies of Austen, such as Arielle Eckstut's *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen*, or Seth Grahame-Smith's novelistic mash-up, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.<sup>54</sup> Austen's work has come to signify, in the popular mindset, literature in which something is lacking, in which there is some kind of embarrassing absence. 'What she sees across the land,' writes Raymond Williams, 'is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen.'<sup>55</sup> '[W]hat beat me,' says Kipling's Macklin in 'The Janeites', explaining Austen's novels, 'was there was nothin' to 'em nor in 'em.'<sup>56</sup> This absence is construed as asexual and apolitical, or rather as effeminate and conservative. As D. A. Miller argues, Austen's place as the ideal feminine writer renders her work almost as dangerous to masculine sexual identity as 'the wrong kind of pornography', shaming Austen-loving boys into closeting their desire for her texts.<sup>57</sup> Miller quotes Leo Bersani:

The butch number swaggering into a bar in a leather get-up opens his mouth and sounds like a pansy, takes you home, where the first thing you notice is the complete works of Jane Austen, gets you into bed, and – well, you know the rest.<sup>58</sup>

Robust butch masculinity has no room for Austen; when asked if he had read any of Austen's works before entering on a career as a sex-symbol by playing the role of Darcy, Colin Firth responded 'No, not a page. Nineteenth-century literature didn't seem very sexy to me. I had this prejudice that it would probably be girls' stuff.'<sup>59</sup> In the recent television series *Lost in Austen*, the twenty-first-century heroine's boyfriend, when confronted with a very Firth-like Darcy in the flesh, exclaims, 'Darcy's some ponce in a book – some todger-twitching nancy boy,' before punching him.

*Lost in Austen* begins with an explanation of Austen's therapeutic use as a panacea for the ills of life in contemporary society – 'I take it on the chin,' says the heroine, unhappily employed in customer service at a London bank, 'and patch myself up with Jane Austen.'<sup>60</sup> Since the BBC's hugely successful 1995 television production of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has also come to represent a kind of conservative femininity that has been pressed blatantly into the service of high capitalism in order to render it less threatening to women – an eminently merchandisable, intellectually dishonest symbol of false consciousness.

In Irvine Welsh's novelette 'Lorraine Goes to Livingston', mass-market-oriented, highly tame and profitable Regency romance novels support the extreme sexual depravity of the author's husband – and even this jaded necrophiliac porn addict and rapist is struck dumb when his wife decides to spice up her latest Austen-themed production with a little mild bondage and bestiality.<sup>61</sup>

All of this, of course, has everything to do with Austen's super-literary status as a cultural symbol of similar ubiquity (and possessing a more complex, troubling valency) to Shakespeare, and very little to do with Austen's actual writing. Scholarly readings – readings performed 'carefully', as Edward Said puts it – tend to 'open up' Austen's texts, suggesting that, as for George Eliot, 'interpretations are illimitable' where her writing is concerned.<sup>62</sup>

Austen is hinting at this in the conversation between Catherine and the Tilney siblings:

The general pause which succeeded [Henry's] short disquisition on the state of the nation, was put an end to by Catherine, who, in rather a solemn tone of voice, uttered these words, 'I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London.'

Miss Tilney, to whom this was chiefly addressed, was startled, and hastily replied, 'Indeed! – and of what nature?'

'That I do not know, nor who is the author. I have only heard that it is to be more horrible than anything we have met with yet ... I shall expect murder and every thing of the kind.'

'You speak with astonishing composure! But I hope ... if such a design is known beforehand, proper measures will undoubtedly be taken by government to prevent its coming into effect.'

'Government,' said Henry, endeavouring not to smile, 'neither desires nor dares to interfere in such matters. There must be murder; and government cares not how much.'

The ladies stared.

Henry, after a brief disquisition on the substandard female intellect, is 'noble' enough to explain to his companions that there has been a mutual miscommunication – an error in interpretation. He tells Catherine,

'my stupid sister has mistaken all your clearest expressions. You talked of expected horrors in London – and instead of instantly conceiving, as any rational creature would have done, that such words could relate only to a circulating library, she immediately pictured to herself a mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George's Fields; the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood.' (NA, 111–13)

Henry Tilney who, like Austen's readers, is *au fait* with the conventions of domestic novels, knows that there is no likelihood of a bloody riot erupting into Austen's fictionalised Somerset countryside. If Henry's complacent, half-serious misogyny was insufficient to alert early readers to the fact that he is not a reliably accurate source of information, they would at least be aware of the fact that such riots remained a possibility throughout this revolutionary period, culminating in the bloody massacre of Manchester's St Peter's Field in 1819, the year after *Northanger Abbey's* publication, an event which proved that even in England there *could* be murder, the laws *would* connive at it and 'government cares not how much' (NA, 112).

Bakhtin calls such intrusion of the 'real' into fiction a phenomenon 'of extreme importance' in the history of the novel – the 'novel's special relationship with extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres'.<sup>63</sup> The realism that belongs to the genre of domestic fiction in this period excludes such 'sensational' material as war, famine, riot and industrial unrest, but Austen makes a joke of pointing out that they are nevertheless real, even urgent possibilities. If the realist novel truly represented contemporary 'reality', it would have to include some of the violence and uncertainty of that revolutionary period.<sup>64</sup> What Austen makes unsettlingly clear in *Northanger Abbey* is that danger, violence and evil are not confined to or excluded from any literary genre: different generic conventions merely make certain that they are represented differently. The caricatured, gothic villains of Radcliffe, when they make their appearance in Austen's novels, are metamorphosed into English gentlemen and ladies: wealthy, respectable pillars of Regency society.

Ultimately, this is the true criticism of gothic fiction undertaken by Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. In the late eighteenth century gothic fiction

did seem full of potential for harnessing the political power of the novel, as Wollstonecraft, for one, recognised. Twentieth-century authors such as George Orwell, Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood have succeeded notably in once again turning the gothic novel to serious political ends. Austen uses the gothic in a more radically critical fashion. Not only does she poke fun at Radcliffe's 'stage trick[s]',<sup>65</sup> and her comforting, if increasingly implausible rational explanations, but she also criticises the hollow reassurances of the whole gothic genre, which even in its most frightening, suspenseful moments reminds its readers that 'it is only a novel', and therefore nothing to be afraid of (NA, 38). The world outside Austen's domestic fiction – a world she paradoxically brings *within* the novels through her ironic references to their fictionality – is a dark and dangerous place, even without contending with zombies and vampires. Catherine Morland may only go so far as to declare the brutal, domineering General Tilney 'not perfectly amiable', but Austen's education of her readers has prepared them for even greater atrocities (NA, 200).

# 3

## Texts and Pretexts: *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*

Works of Fiction have been produced, abounding at once with the most interesting details, and the most sagacious reflections, and which differ from treatises of abstract philosophy only by the greater justness of their views, and the higher interest which they excite. And it may be presumed, that a path, at once so useful and delightful, will continue to be trod: It may be presumed, that virtue and vice, the conduct of human life, what we are expected to feel, and what we are called on to do and suffer, will long be taught by example, a method which seems better fitted to improve the mind than abstract propositions and dry discussions.

– John Dunlop<sup>1</sup>

There are few works to which I am oftener tempted to turn for profit or delight, than to the standard productions in this species of composition. We find there a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world.

– William Hazlitt<sup>2</sup>

Julia Kristeva has argued that ‘any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another’.<sup>3</sup> We know that *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel formed out of another novel, its lost ur-text *Elinor and Marianne*; likewise, *Pride and Prejudice* is the rewritten version of the vanished *First Impressions*. Both *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions* most likely belonged to the period of Austen’s artistic development called, dismissively, the ‘betweenities’, and including the fragment *Catharine, or the Bower* and the epistolary *Lady Susan*.<sup>4</sup> The first draft of *Elinor and Marianne* may have predated the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* by

as much as 16 years, while *Pride and Prejudice* endured a similarly lengthy gestational period.<sup>5</sup> The composition of the two novels is intertwined – both enact the transition from epistolarity to free indirect discourse that was an historic reality of the eighteenth-century novel; both treat the subject of the impact of money on class, gender and personal freedom; both share similar titles, plot structures and characters. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* are, like the heroines they portray, sisters: light and dark texts with distinct personalities and destinies, paired for contrast, but ultimately bearing the same origin and ancestry.

Austen's first-published novels are chimerical creatures, born out of her wide and critical early reading. *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions* may well have grown directly out of Austen's juvenile writing, and continued in that vein of viciously satirical, but ultimately lighthearted (because careless) parody. There are clear stylistic differences, however, between the juvenilia and the first two published novels of Austen's adulthood. The fundamentally darker tone of *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, reflects 15 years of reading and thinking. The author of this novel, like the character through which so much of it is narrated, is 'not so much at ease, nor her satisfaction in [old] amusements so pure', as was the author of the juvenilia (SS, 54). No longer content merely to skewer the shortcomings and spoof the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen interrogates these conventions and finds them wanting. This is what makes Claudia Johnson call the novel 'dark and disenchanted'; it provides the source of Marilyn Butler's sense that 'the very last impression left by an Austen novel is one of doubt'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps alone among Romantic-era novelists, Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* demonstrates that she has no authorial conviction of the accepted moral truths that underpin existing novelistic conventions – that ostensibly provide the moral justification for the novel itself. *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, can be considered the greatest triumph of romantic comedy, synonymous now with its principles of love, humour, wit and the happily-ever-after so rarely found in true fairy tales.<sup>7</sup> In the public consciousness, it is also a synecdoche for Austen's œuvre, along with an entire genre, even industry of romance, and repeated and adapted over and over as the archetype and stereotype of the ideal romantic story. Read in conjunction with *Sense and Sensibility*, however, it becomes clear that Austen did not abandon the disenchanted perspective of her earlier novel in *Pride and Prejudice*, but rather found means to present *Sense and Sensibility*'s dark truths through a comic lens which is almost 'too light & bright & sparkling' (L, 212).

Both novels were written, and eventually published, in an environment that was increasingly hostile both to women's rights and to the novel, a literary medium seen as debasedly feminine.<sup>8</sup> Both novels attempt to canvass problems of politics, society and fiction, but by distinct methods. Where *Sense and Sensibility* works through comedy so dark it threatens to fall into

tragedy, *Pride and Prejudice* examines the same concerns through a glittering prism of ironic comedy. Its comedy is so light, bright and sparkling as to dazzle its readers, blinding them to its deliberate elision of those themes which *Sense and Sensibility* explores so painfully. Only by reading the novels as two iterations of one singular artistic struggle does the full extent of Austen's achievement come to light.

This chapter examines Austen's deployment and criticism of a number of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions, some of which amount to genres in their own right – such as the novel of disinheritance; the related circulation novel (also called the It-narrative); and the use of London as a literary site for playing out sexual anxieties – as they are considered, criticised and recreated in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Each of these conventions, and more, are subsumed by Austen's art in the marriage plot that is central to domestic fiction, a plot that the writer turned to in each of her novels, with deliberate, dismal anticlimax in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the most spectacular comic effect in *Pride and Prejudice*.

*Sense and Sensibility* is an experiment in synthesising multiple fictional conventions, and what results is a kind of Frankenstein's monster: a being greater than the sum of its parts, with its own individual consciousness, but still ultimately unhappy. The conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, Austen shows, have come to regulate and circumscribe the possibilities for fiction. In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen subjects these conventions to a final test, and finds them lacking. *Pride and Prejudice* subverts the traditions of the novel even further, as the triumph of Austen's irony remakes the unswerving social criticism of *Sense and Sensibility* into one of the greatest comic literary myths.

\* \* \* \* \*

The novels we will never cease to admire, *Clarissa*, *Clémentine*, *Tom Jones*, *The Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Werther*, etc., seek to reveal or trace a crowd of feelings which, in the depths of the soul, make up life's happiness or its unhappiness. These are the feelings we never speak aloud because they are bound up with our secrets or our frailties, and because men spend their lives with men, without ever confiding in one another what they feel.

– Germaine de Staël<sup>9</sup>

Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain  
If with too credent ear you list his songs,  
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open  
To his unmastered importunity.  
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,

And keep within the rear of your affection,  
 Out of the shot and danger of desire.  
 The chariest maid is prodigal enough  
 If she unmask her beauty to the moon.  
 Virtue itself scapes not calumnious strokes.

– William Shakespeare<sup>10</sup>

‘sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself, [said Marianne] because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning ... my feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But *sometimes* they are.’

(SS, 97, 88, Austen’s emphasis)

Tracing the compositional history of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* – a history that spans not only the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, but also Austen’s own existence as a ‘young lady’ – is ultimately a speculative exercise. The allusive literary practices of the two novels, however, invite and even demand such speculation, requiring of their readers a kind of investigative attitude: ‘I do not write for such dull Elves,’ teases Austen, referencing Scott, ‘As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves’ (L, 210).<sup>11</sup> The novels’ lengthy, intertwined development makes them, in many respects, ideal subjects for exploring Austen’s evolving critical attitudes towards the literature of the eighteenth century.

It is possible that both *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions* began as epistolary novels, one of the most characteristically eighteenth-century fictional formats.<sup>12</sup> Austen had employed epistolarity in a number of stories in her juvenilia, parodying the method’s shortcomings mercilessly in *Volume the First’s* ‘Amelia Webster’. She also completed an epistolary novella, *Lady Susan*, around the time of the genesis of *First Impressions* and *Elinor and Marianne*. *Lady Susan’s* third-person conclusion – that the ‘Correspondence, by a meeting between some of the Parties & a separation between the others, could not, to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue, be continued longer’ – shows evidence of Austen’s impatience with epistolary narrative (MW, 311).<sup>13</sup> The heyday of the epistolary novel was over: in her 1804 *Life of Richardson* Barbauld recognises that the form Richardson had popularised has serious drawbacks: ‘it is the most natural and the least probable way of telling a story’, she writes, and the fact that ‘letters should be written at all times, and upon every occasion in life, that those letters should ... altogether form a connected story, it requires much art to render specious’.<sup>14</sup>

If *Pride and Prejudice* began as an epistolary novel, the 16 inset letters in the text – not including the many mentions of letters being read, written and received which are not quoted fully – provide ample evidence from which its early epistolary structure might be extrapolated. There are fewer

inset letters in *Sense and Sensibility*, nevertheless its epistolary foundations are not difficult to trace. For example, Elinor muses early in her residence at Barton that her new environment 'afforded her no companion that could make amends for what she had left behind, nor that could teach her to think of Norland with less regret than ever. Neither Lady Middleton nor Mrs. Jennings could supply to her the conversation she missed' (SS, 54). While in the surviving text the reader must conclude that Elinor's regrets refer to her dead father or to the absent Edward Ferrars, last seen at Norland, Brian Southam suggests that the passage in fact refers to a deleted correspondent, the recipient of the letters that once formed the text of *Elinor and Marianne*.<sup>15</sup> Broader textual correspondences with the epistolary tradition remain. The novel-in-letters, as Janet Altman writes, 'seems tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and reunion', and the geography of Austen's novel bears out this convention.<sup>16</sup> Marianne's character is also fairly typical of epistolary heroines. Ruth Perry argues that the 'epistolary mode ... made plausible a new kind of heroine – literate, isolated, unhappy – who ... poured out their hearts on paper, valued their individual happiness above social approval', and generally behaved like Austen's heroine of sensibility.<sup>17</sup> Yet the character of Marianne Dashwood transcends those of her furiously corresponding forbears in complexity and personal agency.<sup>18</sup>

The epistolary beginnings of *Sense and Sensibility*, and possibly of *Pride and Prejudice* too, can now only be the subject of academic guesswork. They were far from being the only texts Austen drew on in the composition of the two novels, however, and her other sources – the novels of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – have survived. Studying these other texts can shed light on Austen's creative process, and on her critical responses to her reading. Ultimately it was this critically creative practice that allowed Austen's revolutionary contributions to the development of the genre.

In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, it is possible to identify some of the textual elements that must have existed from the novel's first composition. For example, its many allusions to Frances Burney's first novel *Evelina* (1778) and Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* (1791), both of which feature characters named Willoughby, would have been more current during its first drafting.<sup>19</sup> Evidence from Austen's short burlesque 'Jack and Alice' indicates that she had read Frances Brooke's novel *The Excursion* (1777) in her adolescence: echoes of Brooke's novel in Austen's text most likely appeared in early drafts. Austen's well-known youthful obsession with Richardson also suggests that she would have had both *Clarissa* and the early scenes from *Sir Charles Grandison* in which Harriet Byron briefly visits London in mind during the early stages of the novel's composition.<sup>20</sup> References in *Sense and Sensibility* to Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and Germaine de Staël's *Delphine* (1802), however, must not have appeared until a later version of the novel was written. These additions indicate that after writing *Elinor and Marianne*

Austen used elements garnered from subsequent reading both to update her novel and to create a richly layered effect of interlacing allusions.

One novel which has a strong claim to being one of the underlying narratives influencing the early *Elinor and Marianne* is Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), from which Marianne's very eighteenth-century hobby-horse seems to have been drawn. The eponymous vicar shares Marianne's disdain for second attachments, and prides himself 'upon being a strict monogamist'. *The Vicar of Wakefield* follows a similar plot to a novel of disinheritance. The hapless vicar and his family are forced to leave their parish after a local merchant's sudden bankruptcy reveals the loss of their fortune, and they come to inhabit a small cottage, which subsequently burns down. The vicar's two daughters, Sophia and Olivia, are courted by two contrasting young men. 'Squire Thornhill, the family's attractive landlord, turns out to have a reputation for making it 'his whole study to betray the daughters of such as received him to their houses'. His Lovelace-like attempt to lure the vicar's daughters to London failing, Thornhill ultimately dupes Olivia with 'honourable, though private, proposals', and an apparently sham marriage performed by a Roman Catholic priest. Not only would such a marriage be unbinding after the passage of the Hardwicke Marriage Act (1753), but it is also revealed that Thornhill has had numerous bigamous marriages performed by the same accomplice. Eventually it is revealed that Thornhill himself has been duped, his servant duplicitously procuring an official marriage licence and 'a true priest' to legitimise the marriage, in the hope of later blackmailing his master. As a result, Thornhill is disowned by his wealthy uncle, and has his estate made over to Olivia's control. Meanwhile Thornhill's uncle, previously disguised as a poor eccentric named Burchell, marries Sophia.<sup>21</sup>

The earliest version of *Elinor and Marianne* may well have begun as a response to Goldsmith's popular novel. As a pre-eminent classic of sentimental fiction, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is a fitting place from which to begin an investigation of Austen's meditations on the concepts of sense and sensibility. Austen removes all the most pathetic elements of Goldsmith's novel from her narrative: the father rescuing his family from a burning cottage; tearful reconciliation scenes; and the man who has worn out his fortune with excess generosity and now, like the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, spies on his heir incognito.<sup>22</sup> The central themes, however, of a genteel family faced with a sudden fall in social status and of the ambiguous position of a seduced (or almost-seduced) young woman – as well as more humorous criticisms of sentimental chestnuts such as comfortable, desirable cottages and the abjuration of second marriages – were retained, along with the structural element of contrasting sister-heroines. Austen's presentation of the story from the perspective of the two heroines – by killing off Goldsmith's father-narrator in her own first chapter – allows her heroines a level of independence and intellect lacking in Goldsmith's characters. While the vicar's

daughters Sophia and Olivia are only shown as members of a family to which they are alternately a source of pride or shame, Elinor and Marianne are individuals with separate, well-developed, independent consciousnesses.

The greatest structural contrast between the two novels is in Austen's obvious rejection of Goldsmith's tidy morality. In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the 'good' sister Sophia is ultimately rewarded with marriage to the now-undisguised baronet, while the once-disgraced 'bad' sister Olivia is restored to respectability and given total financial power over her seducer/husband. Austen's union of Marianne with Colonel Brandon – a character in many respects resembling Goldsmith's mysterious disguised baronet – complicates the easy comic morality of Goldsmith's novel. By rewarding Brandon with Marianne, Austen makes clear that her novel combines aspects of the baronet's character with that of his wicked, rakish heir. In so doing, she reminds her readers that Brandon is not an uncomplicatedly 'good' hero, but rather a somewhat sinister figure. After all, more than one young woman connected to him has become the victim of seduction and disgrace. The name 'Brandon' itself echoes this moral ambiguity, as by the early nineteenth century readers knew that 'Brandon Hall' is the name of Mr B.'s home in *Pamela* (and therefore the 'B' is likely for Brandon).<sup>23</sup> The colonel is alone of Austen's heroes in having no Christian name.

Another instance of the part-playful, part-serious effect of Austen's literary criticism on the construction of the novel is her use of *Hamlet*. 'We have never finished Hamlet, Marianne; our dear Willoughby went away before we could get through it,' remarks Mrs Dashwood soon after Willoughby's departure – but Austen allows *Sense and Sensibility* to work through much of Shakespeare's plot (SS, 85). Tony Tanner guesses that Willoughby 'had perhaps arrived at the part where Hamlet inexplicably rejects Ophelia'.<sup>24</sup> Austen takes up the rest of the play's narrative from Ophelia's perspective. Although Willoughby's motives soon become clear enough, rendering him a far less intriguing hero than Hamlet, appropriating some of Shakespeare's plot allows Austen scope for exploration of Ophelia's character through that of Marianne. Ophelia's madness takes hold offstage, between the players' performance and her last appearance in the fourth Act, when Horatio declares 'She is importunate, | Indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied.' In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen allows the reader to witness Marianne's deteriorating state, albeit from Elinor's point of view. Elinor's sympathetic, but increasingly impatient attitude towards Marianne's suffering, is underscored by Austen's apparently bathetic joke at Ophelia's expense, when she recreates the scene of her drowning:

As one incapable of her own distress

...

long it could not be

Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,

Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death.<sup>25</sup>

In *Sense and Sensibility*, of course, Marianne is not drowned by the weight of her water-sodden clothes. In an instance of comical reduction, she instead wanders around Cleveland's grounds, and her walking

where the trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest, had – assisted by the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings – given Marianne a cold so violent, as ... would force itself by increasing ailments, on the concern of every body, and the notice of herself. (SS, 306)

Like Elinor, the reader is encouraged by the triviality of the wet stockings to dismiss Marianne's illness as merely another instance of her self-absorbed, oversensitive 'sensibility', but we are soon taught to take the scenario much more seriously. Reducing Ophelia to a heroine of domestic fiction does lead to some humorous effects, but also opens up the possibility for a more nuanced view of Ophelia herself. More than this, Marianne's illness and her association with Ophelia allow the reader to take Marianne's sensibility much more seriously, and to re-evaluate her as a character. While she has been mistaken in Willoughby, Marianne is not necessarily mistaken in her own self-image of one who thinks and feels as deeply and as sensitively as a true literary heroine. Austen's use of *Hamlet* here – an appropriation that speaks to her stunning authorial self-confidence – suggests that Marianne's seemingly laughable claims to being a great tragic figure should not be unthinkingly dismissed.

Another tragic heroine with links to Marianne is Delphine, the eponymous heroine of Germaine de Staël's 1802 novel. The young Parisian widow shares Marianne's idealistic view of human behaviour: 'I enter society with a kindly and truthful nature,' she writes, 'some wit, youth, and wealth: why would these gifts of Providence not make me happy? Why should I fret over opinions I do not share, conventions I do not know? The heart's morality and religion have sustained men along paths far more difficult than mine.' Her more conservative lover Léonce is both attracted and disturbed by Delphine's idealism, writing of her,

Delphine enlivens conversation by the interest she takes in what she says and in what she hears; no pretention, no constraint: she aims to please but will only do so by fostering her natural qualities. All the women I have known more or less manoeuvred to impress others, only Delphine is both proud enough and simple enough to believe she is all the more lovable for showing her feelings openly.

By reproducing much of Delphine's character in her own sentimental heroine Marianne, Austen is able to continue Staël's central question, 'Where would we be ... if all women were guided by what they call their own lights?' Like Staël, Austen allows her own female characters the agency to act largely independently of the social expectations of women's behaviour. Fanny Dashwood is selfish, Lucy Steele is scheming, Nancy Steele and Mrs Jennings are vulgar and bawdy, Marianne is indiscreet. Even Elinor, outwardly tactful and prudent, is inwardly caustic, jealous and sarcastic. Although Staël's female characters are allowed a greater degree of nobility (both literal and figurative) than Austen's, each is still demonstrably scheming towards her own ends, and Delphine is alone in acting selflessly. In relocating Staël's novel in England, Austen strips many of Staël's characters of their heroic qualities. A ballroom scene in *Delphine* similar to that in which Marianne is first rejected by Willoughby, demonstrates the way in which Austen turns Staël's characters' principles and sense of honour into contemptible pettinesses in her own work:

'Good God! What is the matter with you?'

She was struck with the sudden change in my face ... Losing control, Delphine so gave way to her anxiety that, weak as I was, I saw all eyes fixed on her. The fear of compromising her renewed my strength, and I made up my mind to reach the adjoining room. It was only a few steps away. Aware only of my condition, Delphine followed me, crossed the whole ballroom without greeting anyone, and seeing me unsteady on my feet, took my arm to keep me from falling. It was useless to keep repeating that I felt better ... she thought only of my danger, displaying for all to see her inordinate distress and her intense interest.

Oh, Delphine! At that moment, as before the altar, I swore that I would be your husband. You pledged yourself to me; I received custody of your innocent destiny, when, because of me, a cloud came over your reputation!<sup>26</sup>

In the similar scene in *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne's language echoes Delphine's. 'Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? ... Will you not shake hands with me? ... Tell me, Willoughby; for heaven's sake tell me, what is the matter?' (SS, 176, 177). Willoughby's response, however, is the opposite of Léonce's, and he turns against Marianne not because of his fears of her virtue and respectability, but in pursuit of a larger income. Acts of spectacular, disinterested generosity are routine in Staël's novel (Delphine, for instance, gives over a large amount of real estate to her friend's daughter for a dowry at the novel's opening), but so unlikely in the commercialised world of *Sense and Sensibility* that their occurrence is shocking. 'Colonel Brandon give *me* a living! – Can it be possible?' Edward Ferrars asks, before wrongly concluding he has benefited from the colonel's attachment to

Elinor, and accepting the living anyway (SS, 289). Any concept of human nature is far less idealised in *Sense and Sensibility* than in *Delphine*: we can read Austen's criticism of Staël's romanticism in her own characters' shortcomings. The minor hypocrisy, flaws and littlenesses of Austen's characters align them with a realist mode of fiction, but we can see in their similarity to *Delphine's* characters, among others, that this colouration is in direct response to, and is itself a criticism of, idealised figures in fiction.

Austen's regard for 'mixed' and even downright villainous characters is evident in her earliest criticism. In her juvenile 'History of England', Austen had mischievously announced her support of Delamere, the mentally unbalanced, passionate anti-hero of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), just as women readers of *Clarissa* had once declared themselves of Lovelace's party, to Richardson's dismay (MW, 143).<sup>27</sup> The proverb Richardson explicitly sets out to refute in *Clarissa* is 'that dangerous but too commonly received notion, that a reformed rake makes the best husband'.<sup>28</sup> The 'notion' itself is revealed as problematic not so much because the rake's reformation is an unlikely prospect, but because of the spectre of female sexuality it raises. The flipside of the proverb is that women may seek out sexually attractive and experienced men for husbands because of their own sexual desires, whereas a prudent (prudish?) woman would confine herself to suitors lacking even the rumour of a libidinous past. Women's own libidos pose a very real threat to their disposal as property by a commercial/patriarchal society, as they reveal the disturbing fact that what society would rather view as an object to be disposed of prudentially, is in fact possessed of independent agency. As any kind of lustful agency is inherently politically, socially and economically disruptive, novel after novel in this period attempts to police and punish such out-of-line emotions and impulses. 'Fallen' women are the scapegoats and cautionary effigies of this desire, as the phrase 'she was asking for it' tacitly, and sometimes even explicitly, underpins each reiteration of the figure: I repeat Scott's comment: 'we are apt to blame Clarissa herself'; a remark which, when heaped on Clarissa's own almost unbearable self-accusations, must count as one of the most callous, and most redundant examples of literary criticism.<sup>29</sup>

As *Sense and Sensibility's* Sir John Middleton and his mother-in-law make clear, women's (especially young women's) sexuality is a kind of public property. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson points out that while the phrase 'setting your cap' at a man is 'innocent enough parlance', Sir John's references to 'tumbling about and spraining of ancles' are insinuating allusions to, respectively, women's sexual activity and pregnancy (SS, 45).<sup>30</sup> What Sir John's comments – like the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice* – show is that women's sexuality is a kind of public property, or at least a property open to public speculation. A woman's sexual status is publicly known: she is always virgin (*Miss Dashwood*), or wife (*Mrs Dashwood*), or fallen woman/whore (poor *Eliza*). The epistemological problem of discriminating between

the 'modest girls' and those who lack 'virtue' (*vartue* in Henry Fielding's mocking terminology) is central to much of the fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to *Sense and Sensibility* in particular. Those women who cannot be easily ascribed to one category or another are a favourite, because productively problematic, topic in fiction. Delphine and Ophelia follow Lucrece's classical precedent by committing suicide; Clarissa Harlowe and Eliza Brandon (Eliza I) die slightly more 'natural', but no less convenient, deaths; patched-up marriages are arranged for Olivia Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, for Marianne Dashwood, and for Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The most crucial issue, however, is one which seems to be beyond the scope of the novel at this time to answer. Nevertheless, Austen's project in *Sense and Sensibility* comes close to expressing something new and troubling to the conventions of the novel, and of 'romantic love' itself. Behind this is what Tony Tanner refers to as the 'muffled scream from Marianne at the heart of the novel', the expression of women's sexual desire and frustration.<sup>31</sup> When reproached by Elinor with his seduction of Brandon's ward Eliza, Willoughby facetiously declares 'I do not mean to justify myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge – that because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because *I* was a libertine, *she* must be a saint' (SS, 322). Elizabeth Bennet, on first learning of Lydia's elopement, thinks in fairly hackneyed, moralistic terms that 'neither her [sister's] virtue nor her understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey', but Elizabeth's better comprehension of Lydia's desires threatens to permeate her conservative thinking: 'she was convinced that Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to *any body*' (PP, 280, my emphasis). The pun here speaks what for Elizabeth remains understood but necessarily unspoken: Lydia has been literally trying to 'attach herself' to any male body that will have her. Between fallen whore and blameless virgin lies a concept of women's sexuality beyond one of mere victimhood that novel after novel seems unable to articulate. Each attempt by Anna Howe to elicit Clarissa's true opinion of Lovelace is met with silence, just as Marianne's interrogation of Elinor's feelings for Edward Ferrars ends in mutual disappointment:

'Esteem him! Like him! Cold-hearted Elinor! Oh! worse than cold-hearted! Ashamed of being otherwise. Use those words again and I will leave the room this moment.'

Elinor could not help laughing. 'Excuse me,' said she, 'and be assured that I meant no offence to you, by speaking, in so quiet a way, of my own feelings. Believe them to be stronger than I have declared; believe them, in short, to be such as his merit, and the suspicion – the hope of his affection for me may warrant, without imprudence or folly. But farther than this you must *not* believe.' (SS, 21)

Like Polonius criticising Ophelia's credulity of Hamlet's 'holy vows' as 'springs to catch woodcocks', Elinor also attempts to tutor Marianne in understanding her own coded language, cautioning her younger sister against reading too much into her obliquely expressed affection for Edward.<sup>32</sup> This scene operates in several ways in the text: as a contrast between the two sisters, particularly in their use of language and their emotional openness; as a source of information to Marianne and the reader of Elinor's feelings for Edward; and as an ideal model of reticent feminine behaviour which Marianne will later regret not following. Marianne is closer to Elinor than any of the novel's other characters; indeed, Austen's attempt to salvage something like a traditionally comic ending from her subdued conclusion states that 'among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves' (SS, 380). The phrasing of this sentence, with its double negatives ('not be ... least considerable'; 'without disagreement') does little to disperse the gloominess of the novel's final chapters.

\* \* \* \* \*

Marianne ... started hastily up, and with feverish wildness, cried out –

'Is mama coming? –'

'Not yet,' replied the other, concealing her terror ... 'It is a great way, you know, from hence to Barton.'

'But she must not go round by London,' cried Marianne, in the same hurried manner, 'I shall never see her, if she goes by London.'

(SS, 310–11)

But were I even to get safely to London ... what might not my youth, my sex, an unacquaintedness with the ways of that great, wicked town, expose me to? – I should hardly dare to go to church, for fear of being discovered. People would wonder how I lived. Who knows but I might pass for a kept mistress; and that, although nobody came to me, yet that every time I went out it might be imagined to be in pursuance of some assignation?

– Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, 335

'Here I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I begin already to find my Morals corrupted' (L, 5). So wrote Jane Austen from London in 1796, perhaps not long after first drafting *Elinor and Marianne*.

It is a characteristically mocking reference to London's reputation and its role in the eighteenth-century novel as the stereotypical setting for the dramatic downfall of the vulnerable and the morally weak.<sup>33</sup> 'We do not look in great cities for our best morality,' says Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* (MP, 93). Instead, in both *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, London is the site of illicit sexual relationships, the place to which Wickham flees with Lydia Bennet, and where Mrs Rushworth begins her adulterous affair with Henry Crawford. Only in *Sense and Sensibility*, however, do Austen's protagonists (and the narrative) spend any significant length of time in the metropolis.

Superficially, Austen's inclusion of historical detail, particularly the use of actual street names, appears to ground *Sense and Sensibility's* London scenes in reality. The novel's multiple allusions to other texts, however, complicate this sense of authenticity by emphasising the city's frequent use as a novelistic setting, and the many literary antecedents of the Dashwoods' journey there. *Sense and Sensibility* has been called a novel 'about secrecy'.<sup>34</sup> While this is certainly the case, considering the novel's London episode in light of its responsiveness to related scenes in other texts obliges its readers to reassess the role of secrecy in the novel. The treatment of similar scenarios by writers such as Richardson, Burney, Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth and Brooke clearly positions Marianne Dashwood in a tradition of heroines whose 'virtue' or respectability is threatened during their time in London. London, in the eighteenth-century novel, becomes *the* place in which a heroine's sexual status is subject to questioning. Illuminating the recurrence of this theme in the literature of the eighteenth century, however, shifts the central question of Austen's novel from the particular, that is, 'what is the status of Marianne's relationship with Willoughby?', to the more general: what can a novel represent, and what must it conceal?

The Dashwood sisters' journey to London, in the second volume of *Sense and Sensibility*, is from the outset a source of disagreement between Elinor and Marianne. When Mrs Jennings first asks the sisters to accompany her to town, Elinor refuses the invitation, 'in which she believed herself to be speaking for their united inclinations' (SS, 153). In her 'eagerness to be with Willoughby again', however, Marianne ignores 'every impediment' to Mrs Jennings's scheme (SS, 154–6). The principal objection Elinor is able to voice (she says nothing of her anxiety about meeting Edward Ferrars) is to Mrs Jennings herself. Mrs Jennings, says Elinor, 'is not a woman whose society can afford us pleasure, or whose protection will give us consequence' (SS, 156). While Elinor appears here to be guilty of the fastidiousness she identifies in her sister, her characteristic prudence is justified by the fate of other novelistic heroines, who suffer from inadequate 'protection' in London.

Explaining her support for the scheme the ever-optimistic Mrs Dashwood declares, 'I would have every young woman of your condition in life,

acquainted with the manners and amusements of London' (SS, 156). Her eldest daughter's reflections are otherwise:

Elinor could not find herself in the carriage with Mrs. Jennings, and beginning a journey to London under her protection, and as her guest, without wondering at her own situation, so short had their acquaintance with that lady been, so wholly unsuited were they in age and disposition, and so many had been her objections against such a measure only a few days before! (SS, 159)

Part of the reason for the disparate opinions of Elinor and her mother arises from their different understandings of the Dashwood sisters' position in society. A winter excursion to London was, in many respects, an important signifier of wealth during Austen's lifetime. The historian Amanda Vickery, attempting to define the expectations of eighteenth-century 'genteel families', argues that they did not 'expect to decamp to London for the Season'.<sup>35</sup> John Dashwood, the heir to Elinor's former home, Norland Park, takes 'a very good house' in Harley Street for the winter, marking him as one of the wealthiest members of the gentry (SS, 230). This is the 'condition in life' in which Mrs Dashwood mentally places her daughters, a sharp contrast to the 'situation' in which Elinor finds herself in Mrs Jennings's carriage, where she and her sister literally take the place of the maid Betty.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike her mother and younger sister, Elinor understands only too well her diminished status in a society in which wealth is the paramount signifier of personal importance. Her sensitivity to the ways in which she and her sister are likely to be perceived and judged by others may be seen as the source of her unease. Her response is to curtail her expectations: whereas Marianne names as 'a competence' the sum of 'two thousand [pounds] a-year', Elinor calls half that income 'wealth' (SS, 91). She also attempts to avoid any situation that might expose Marianne or herself to criticism that could harm their respectability or, in other words, their genteel status. Aside from their small stock of accomplishments and smaller dowries, respectability is the sisters' chief asset in the marriage market. London, the centre of English commerce, was recognised as the central hub of this market, as well as the busiest site of other forms of commercialised sexual exchange. This is one of London's chief literary roles in the eighteenth century. As Moretti writes,

Here people meet to complete their transactions, and here is also where all the trouble of Austen's universe occurs: infatuations, scandals, slanders, seductions, elopements – disgrace. And all of this happens because the marriage market (again, like every other market) has produced its own brand of swindlers: shady relatives, social climbers, speculators, seducers, déclassé aristocrats.<sup>37</sup>

In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson exposes the dark realities of this market through the words of his hero's thuggish, worldly father. The abusive, 'rakish' baronet sneers at his daughter:

'Why, Caroline, you shall have a husband, I tell you. I will hasten with you to the London market. Will you be offer'd at Ranelagh market first? the concert or breakfasting? – Or shall I shew you at the opera, or at the play? ... You shall stick some of your mother's jewels in your hair, and in your bosom, to draw the eyes of fellows. You must strike at once, while your face is new; or you will be mingled with the herd of women, who prostitute their faces at every polite place.'<sup>38</sup>

While radical feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft characterised a marriage entered into 'for a support' as 'legal prostitution', most novelists of the period refrained from expressing such opinions explicitly.<sup>39</sup> One interesting eighteenth-century novelistic trope does come close to implying the uncomfortable parallels between marriage and prostitution, and Austen examines this at length in *Sense and Sensibility*. In novels such as Burney's *Evelina* and Frances Brooke's *The Excursion*, respectable heroines visit London with inadequate protection – their social status unclear – and are affronted by wealthy men who attempt to engage them as mistresses. When they realise they have been mistaken for prostitutes, heroines in these novels are not only indignant, but also shamed and humiliated. Marianne follows this pattern, assuming after Willoughby's rejection of her that she has 'been cruelly used ... I could rather believe every creature of my acquaintance leagued together to ruin me in his opinion'. Resisting Elinor's encouragement to respond with 'reasonable and laudable pride', Marianne responds, 'misery such as mine has no pride ... they who suffer little may be proud and independent as they like – may resist insult, or return mortification – but I cannot. I must feel – I must be wretched' (SS, 189–90).

Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* popularised the simplistic identification of women's honour with their sexuality, where 'virtue' is synonymous with virginity. Even Richardson's great villain, Lovelace, agrees with this definition: 'by virtue', he writes, 'I mean chastity'.<sup>40</sup> In this schema, any sexual experience (or even presumed sexual experience) unsanctified by marriage annihilates a woman's claims to respectability. Interrogating this harsh judgment became the task of novelists from the eighteenth century through to the Edwardian period. One problem with such a strict interpretation of female virtue raised in fiction was the difficulty of identifying 'ruined' women. In Burney's *Evelina*, the eponymous heroine, separated from her companions and harassed by 'bold and unfeeling' men, cries out to the first women she sees, 'For Heaven's sake, dear ladies, afford me some protection!' *Evelina* soon makes the 'shocking discovery' that the women

are prostitutes, finding to her 'inexpressible horror' that she has 'sought protection from insult, of those who were themselves most likely to offer it'.

This incident foreshadows another, which arises from the disputed legitimacy of Evelina's birth. Her consequently uncertain social status exposes her to the offensive attentions of Sir Clement Willoughby, who attempts to coerce her into becoming his mistress. One of Sir Clement's stratagems utilises the ambivalent language surrounding sexual relationships, whether socially condoned by marriage, or otherwise. Purporting to be his romantic rival, Lord Orville, Sir Clement writes: 'I desire nothing more ardently, than to pour forth my thanks at your feet, and to offer those vows which are so justly the tribute of your charms and accomplishments,' signing himself 'your grateful admirer'. Evelina's multiple interpretations of this letter demonstrate the extent to which troubling doubts and ambiguities are inherent to interactions between men and women in late eighteenth-century fiction, where it is not always possible to distinguish the language of courtship from that of seduction. She explains her responses to her friend Miss Mirvan:

The moment the letter was delivered to me, I retired to my own room to read it, and so eager was my first perusal, that, – I am ashamed to own it gave me no sensation but of delight. Unsuspicious of any impropriety from Lord Orville, I perceived not immediately the impertinence it implied, – I only marked the expressions of his own regard; and I was so much surprised, that I was unable, for some time, to compose myself, or read it again, – I could only walk up and down the room, repeating to myself, 'Good God, is it possible? – am I, then, loved by Lord Orville?'

But this dream was soon over, and I awoke to far different feelings; upon a second reading, I thought every word changed, – it did not seem the same letter, – I could not find one sentence that I could look at without blushing; my astonishment was extreme, and it was succeeded by the utmost indignation.<sup>41</sup>

Austen's use of inset letters in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* is very different to Burney's in *Evelina*. Where Evelina's interpretation of Willoughby-alias-Orville's letter demonstrates the uncertainties and anxieties surrounding the interpretation of language in general, and letters in particular, such anxieties in the novel are unique to this letter. In the remainder of Burney's epistolary novel – as in most epistolary novels of the eighteenth century – the letters that make up the text are intended by their real and fictional authors to be taken at face value. Even great schemers such as Lovelace for the most part write honestly about their duplicitous machinations. If their behaviour lies, their letters speak the truth. Even in her early epistolary *Lady Susan*, Austen had begun to experiment with unreliable, or downright dishonest letter writers.

In *Sense and Sensibility* those letters that survive in the text demand of their readers a high level of scrutiny and scepticism. Reading Marianne's notes to Willoughby is an exercise in decoding forms of politeness that (Austen makes sure) fail to adequately conceal Marianne's open-hearted emotion. Willoughby's response is something very different, and new in the novel. His letter requires the distressed and disbelieving analysis of both Elinor and Marianne, and the truth of its composition cannot be properly understood until Willoughby arrives at Cleveland to explain its contents and tone to Elinor. This is a major stylistic advance in the use of letters in fiction, and considering the prevalence and popularity of the epistolary form through the eighteenth century must rank as one of Austen's greatest contributions to the development of the novel.

Austen would notably go on to repeat this device in varying ways in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, this technical achievement has little appreciable effect on the plot that might differentiate her text from sources such as *Evelina*. The effect of these two emotionally troubling London letters (the letter to Evelina too warm; that to Marianne far too cold) is the same: like Marianne, Evelina retreats to the country, where her acquaintances remark that she is 'altered, and looking pale and ill'.<sup>42</sup> Like Evelina, Marianne Dashwood has found her journey to London ruinous, if not of her virtue, at least of her health.

Revisiting the device in *Pride and Prejudice* allowed Austen a more sophisticated exploration of the letter's affective power. The structure of the novel is organised to foreground Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, or rather her drawn-out responses to his letter. The 'contrariety of emotion' Elizabeth experiences in reading the letter is – in 1813 – unique to this novel, and this heroine. Elizabeth reads with 'amazement', 'strong prejudice', 'eagerness', 'impatience', 'attention', 'astonishment', 'apprehension' and 'horror'; she is 'angry' and 'perturbed' (*PP*, 204–5). For perhaps the first time in fiction, here the *difficulties* of reading, of eliciting meaning from text, are dramatised:

But when she read, and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars ... again was she forced to hesitate. She put down the letter, weighed every circumstance with *what she meant to be* impartiality – deliberated on the probability of each statement – but with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again she read on. (*PP*, 205, my emphasis)

Elizabeth's epistemological dilemma demonstrates exactly how much effort can go into reading a letter – how much effort, that is, ought to be expended in all our reading. William Galperin argues that the epistolary novel 'mandated – a *competency* in the act of reading that narrative authority effectively usurps', but what Elizabeth's reading of Darcy's letter proves is that this competence is terribly hard to come by.<sup>43</sup> No heroine before

Elizabeth Bennet has her true, penetrating intelligence – an intelligence which even her prodigious capability for self-deceit cannot overpower – and yet her opinions, not only of Darcy and Wickham, but also of herself, are overthrown by a few pages of plainly written prose. In order to understand, however, the significance of Elizabeth's highly developed critical reading (and thus Austen's contribution to the development of the genre) it is necessary to understand the limitations of earlier heroines' critical reading abilities.

Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* is a novel Austen enjoyed in childhood, that resurfaces as another source-text for *Sense and Sensibility*. The novel's heroine, Maria Villiers, like Elizabeth Bennet, is the literary descendent of Restoration and ultimately Shakespearean comic heroines. Nevertheless, they are scarcely recognisable as generically similar. Maria, although a talented and ambitious writer, is possessed of a level of innocent ignorance beyond that of any character in Austen's oeuvre. This ignorance, however, is represented as being the result of her virtue: the 'dignity and purity of Maria's mind left her without an idea of danger'. Maria leaves her respectable country family and travels alone to London to seek her fortune in marriage and by her pen. *The Excursion* has a number of parallels to *Sense and Sensibility*, particularly in its use of overtly contrasted sister-heroines. Orphaned, the sisters are raised by an indulgent uncle. 'Louisa was mild, inactive, tender, romantic; Maria quick, impatient, sprightly, playful': like Marianne Dashwood, Maria is tall, 'her complexion brown', and 'unaffected, undisguised, every turn of temper and of sentiment was painted instantaneously on her countenance'. In London, Maria falls into an acquaintance with Lady Hardy, a woman who – as the reader is informed but as Maria fails to realise – is the leader of 'a certain set', admitting 'ladies of equivocal fame'. While at Lady Hardy's house, Maria is seen by the young, dissolute Lord Melville. 'So much beauty, under such protection' as Lady Hardy, writes Brooke, 'must necessarily attract the notice of every man who was at all its votary.' By presenting the narrative through the divergent viewpoints of its different characters, Brooke (who became a successful playwright) is able to show how each misunderstands the other's intentions. She is also able to demonstrate the ways in which young women's behaviour may become liable to misinterpretation.

Finding that Maria is 'just come from the country', and that she 'is alone in a lodging', Melville concludes that she must be 'a little adventurer, who is looking out for men of a certain rank'. The narrator concurs that the 'impropriety of her unprotected situation' is enough to 'justify suspicion', and he resolves to raise Maria 'to the honour of being his favourite sultana'. He proposes this arrangement to Maria in 'expressions which were rather equivocal', and which Maria interprets as an offer of marriage, as Evelina and Marianne will also do. It is only when Lord Melville thinks better of this arrangement, and dispatches his father to offer Maria five hundred pounds'

compensation, that Maria is finally 'aroused ... to a perfect sense of her situation'.<sup>44</sup>

What links the stories from *Evelina* and *The Excursion* with each other and also with Marianne's in *Sense and Sensibility* is their presentation of London as a site where men's words are a source of anxiety, and where a young woman's reputation for virtue might be doubted, and her respectability damaged as a result. This latter issue may be partly due to the fact that a great many women in the real, historical metropolis, by the standards of contemporary novels, lacked sexual 'virtue'. It is worth noting that Elizabeth Bennet spends very little time in London, staying only to attend the theatre with her sister, aunt and uncle – it is Lydia who takes the traditional literary route to social disgrace in the metropolis. The historian Roy Porter writes that eighteenth-century London, with a population less than one million, 'had in excess of 10,000 prostitutes, openly plying their trade at the theatre and on the street'. Migration from the countryside fed into this army of illegal sex workers, as vulnerable women faced with the harsh economic realities of London turned to prostitution to support themselves. Porter quotes Henry Fielding, who as a magistrate was responsible for punishing 'vice': 'Who can say these poor children had been prostitutes through viciousness? No. They are young, unprotected and of the female sex, therefore they become the prey of the bawd and the debauchee.'<sup>45</sup>

The similar geographic structure of the stories of *Evelina*, Maria Villiers and Marianne Dashwood, however, suggests a further literary basis for this confusion, in the history of another, much less polite, antecedent heroine. In John Cleland's pornographic bestseller, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, the recently orphaned Fanny Hill makes a journey to London from her home in the country. Once in town, she is hired – ostensibly as a maid – by Mrs Brown, a brothel proprietor. Before Fanny can be fully initiated into the profession, however, she runs away with one of the brothel's handsome clients. Fanny Hill's first admirer assumes she is engaged in prostituting herself because of Mrs Brown's reputation. He cavalierly proceeds, recalls Fanny, under the opinion

that I was no novice in these matters, since he had taken me out of a common bawdy-house: nor had I said one thing to prepossess him of my virginity; and if I had, he would sooner have believ'd that I took him for a cully that would swallow such an improbability, than that I was still mistress of that darling treasure ... that my virgin-flower was yet uncrop'd never once enter'd into his head, and he would have thought it idling with time and words to have question'd me upon it.<sup>46</sup>

As a young woman newly arrived in London without adequate protection or obvious personal importance, Fanny – whether she is in fact a prostitute

or not – is considered sexually available. Other women she befriends in the course of her adventures recount similar tales.

Although Cleland's pornography deploys a plethora of euphemisms and metaphors, the inescapably repetitive plot of each episode in which Fanny is shown earning her living, along with the echoes of her story in the experiences of other women in the *Memoirs*, emphasise the impersonality of the sexual acts depicted. The conventions of the sentimental novel which Cleland is, to an extent, writing within, render the bare facts of Fanny's business – sex for cash – problematic. Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, published just 26 years earlier in 1722, evinces no such scruples. Moll is matter-of-fact about the financial aspects of her adventures: 'I resolv'd to let him lye with me, if he offer'd it;' she says at one point, 'but it was because I wanted his help and assistance, and I knew no other way of securing him than that.'<sup>47</sup> In an age of sentiment, Cleland makes an effort to counteract the uncomfortable truths of prostitution by having Fanny reiterate both the pleasure she takes in her work and her authentic love for her sweetheart Charles. At the novel's conclusion, however, Charles's abrupt return and his hasty resolution to marry the now wealthy Fanny undermine Cleland's attempts to sever the financial and sexual elements of his heroine's prostitution. Mary Wollstonecraft, in contrast, emphasises the lack of pleasure and the impersonality of sexual exchange in her account of Jemima in *The Wrongs of Woman*, a woman who has 'read in novels of the blandishments of seduction', but who has lived the reality of an impoverished woman in London. Thrown out onto the street as a child after being raped by her employer, Jemima never has 'even the pleasure of being enticed into vice'. The 'brutes' who follow are both unnumbered and anonymous.<sup>48</sup>

In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen interrogates the idea of a romantic love that is inalienable from its unique object, by demonstrating the possibility of easy transfer of flexible affections from one object to another more desirable. She does this through the text's many instances of mistaken and substituted identities. Mrs Jennings is as easily convinced that Colonel Brandon is in love with Elinor as she was earlier certain that he loved Marianne, and at different points both John Dashwood and Edward Ferrars join her in the error. Marianne, desperate for a visit from Willoughby in London, mistakes first Edward and then Brandon for her faithless beloved; when Willoughby finally turns up at Cleveland Park it is to Elinor's surprise, as she is waiting in expectation of Brandon and Mrs Dashwood. Brandon eventually succeeds in marrying Marianne, where he had failed to marry her *doppelgänger* Eliza years before. Lucy Steele's is the most triumphant substitution, as her loyalty to money leads her to abandon the disinherited Edward for his suddenly wealthy brother Robert. These repeated substitutions draw the reader's attention to the proliferating ways in which the novel almost compulsively reiterates the same stories, transposing them between different characters and reordering them to elicit a variety of meanings. Like the blank lines of

the marriage register in Steventon church with which Austen played as a girl, any plausible names or any two likely candidates will do.<sup>49</sup>

Along with her repetitive substitution of characters throughout the novel, Austen adds to this trade-and-commerce effect with the proliferating source-texts which echo through the novel's almost compulsive intertextuality. It is almost as if we could be reading any plot, any novel, she seems to suggest: as long as enough novelistic conventions are fulfilled, the reader (that is, the text's purchaser or consumer) has no reason to complain. Through this process Austen also demonstrates that London itself is inseparable from the many-layered literary palimpsest of its artistic representations, and suggests that this build-up of novelistic Londons exerts a kind of inescapable pull towards narratives whose repetition makes them seem inevitable. The reiteration of Fanny Hill's story and others like it in fiction and in eighteenth-century life coloured contemporary attitudes towards women's journeys to the capital. Austen, hesitating about her trip to London because she is unsure if the friends she is visiting will be there to receive her, writes that she

had once determined to go with Frank tomorrow & take my chance &<sup>cr</sup>; but they dissuaded me from so rash a step – as I really think on consideration it would have been; for if the Pearsons were not at home, I should inevitably fall a Sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer. (*L*, 12)

Deirdre Le Faye conjectures that Austen intends here a reference to the first plate of William Hogarth's prints *The Harlot's Progress*, which depicts a young woman being tempted by a 'stout procuress' outside a London inn, having just alighted from a country wagon (*L*, 373, n. 4). While Mrs Jennings may attempt to soothe Marianne's agony at Willoughby's rejection with a glass of her late husband's Constantia wine, she is certainly no bawd. She does, however, busy herself in attempting to marry off the young women of her acquaintance, while teasing them in a manner that both Marianne and Elinor find offensive and painful. Mrs Jennings is first described as

a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar. She was full of jokes and laughter, and before dinner was over had said many witty things on the subject of lovers and husbands ... and pretended to see them blush whether they did or not. (*SS*, 34)

This is reminiscent of the behaviour in Mrs Brown's brothel, where Fanny Hill recalls that 'Conversation, example, all, in short, contributed, in that house, to corrupt my native purity ... and all the modesty I was brought up in the habit, (not the instruction) of, began to melt away.'<sup>50</sup> Neither Elinor nor Marianne finds Mrs Jennings's acquaintance morally corrupting, yet

their younger, more impressionable sister Margaret does respond to Mrs Jennings's 'inelegant subjects of raillery', spying on Willoughby's visits to Marianne and gleefully dropping hints about Elinor's romantic interest in Edward Ferrars (SS, 62).

By attributing to Mrs Jennings some of the characteristics of the stereotypical madam, as depicted in Cleland's novel and Hogarth's prints, Austen emphasises the twinned roles of bawd and chaperone, blurring the conventions that distinguish the respectable figure from its underworld shadow. In so doing, Austen complicates and darkens the literary figure of the match-making chaperone, a figure that is already understood as a potential danger to young women. Mrs Jennings has the security of an 'ample jointure' and two 'respectably married' daughters, Austen writes, and has 'therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world. In the promotion of this object she was zealously active' (SS, 36). In this she resembles – as does Mrs Bennet – Maria Edgeworth's creation Mrs Stanhope from *Belinda* (1801), who is known and feared in bachelor circles as 'the catch-match-maker'. 'Young ladies', writes Edgeworth, 'who have the misfortune to be *conducted* by these artful dames, are always supposed to be partners in all their speculations, though their names may not appear in the firm.'<sup>51</sup> Edgeworth makes clear, however, Belinda's moral and intellectual independence from Mrs Stanhope. Belinda refuses to follow her aunt's instructions, seeking out alternative figures of authority and insisting on making her own decisions about her suitor Clarence Hervey, and Edgeworth allows Belinda to reject Mrs Stanhope's advice and even explicit commands without incurring the censure of disobedience. While London offers Belinda some of the temptations and dangers which eighteenth-century heroines routinely encounter – the ruinous expense of clothing, the dubious propriety of masquerades, marriage-hating young men whose gossip can damage a lady's social standing – Edgeworth's heroine, with her country-bred good sense, manages to repel each attempt on her virtue and reputation. Belinda even succeeds in discovering a metropolitan pocket of exemplary conduct in the Percival family. The rapidity, however, with which the Percivals, once introduced, are relocated to the suggestively named Oakly Park, implies that Edgeworth is unable to sustain her presentation of idealised family life outside the country estate. Oakly Park and Lady Anne Percival offer Belinda a refuge from London's perils, and like many heroines before and after her Belinda retreats to the country with relief.

Belinda is an unusually fortunate heroine. Along with her aunt Mrs Stanhope and the matronly paragon Lady Anne Percival, she has the worldly Lady Delacour to advise her and, towards the end of the novel, a sympathetic and honourable hero in Clarence Hervey. Furthermore, Belinda's intelligence and confident reliance on her own principled reasoning render this proliferation of benevolent authority figures all but redundant. Lady Anne is an image of Belinda's future as the respectable mistress of a family,

while the others are useful only to demonstrate Belinda's ethical independence and her ability to compensate for their moral shortcomings. Few contemporary novelists present such a rosy image of society or allow their heroines to navigate its potential dangers so assuredly. In the world of *Belinda*, suspected breast cancer is revealed to be no more than a persistent bruise, addictions to alcohol and opiates are easily overcome and fashionable wives only pretend to cuckold their husbands. Compared with the experience of *The Excursion's* Maria Villiers, or the heroine of Mary Brunton's *Self Control* (1810), who in London comes close to starvation while working to pay rent and support her ailing father, Belinda Portman's sojourn in the metropolis is remarkably carefree. Belinda, *The Excursion's* Maria and *Self Control's* Laura Montreville, however, all suffer from the moral isolation that characterises the eighteenth-century heroine in London.

This isolation is another response to the inevitable commodification of young women on their arrival in London, a retreat into and emphasis of their unique intellectual and emotional subjectivity by those whose physical, public selves are little more than unindividuated wares, no more differentiated than the cattle driven in from the provinces to be exchanged at Smithfield market.<sup>52</sup> This marketing of women leads almost inevitably to their cheapening, an old word for market that also implies a diminution of virtue (Benedick's ideal wife must be 'Virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her', he determines in *Much Ado About Nothing*).<sup>53</sup> Novels, one function of which is to insist on the individuality of their central characters' point of view and hence the unique subjectivity of their narratives, respond to this painful economic reality by dwelling on their emotionally isolated heroines' internal sensibility, their private, inaccessible thoughts that cannot, unlike their bodies, be commodified or violated.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen initially endorses this tradition, allowing her two sister-heroines to become as isolated from one another as they are from those around them. Although the Dashwood sisters, unusually for novelistic heroines, travel to London together, they feel equally unable to share their anxieties and are thus rendered as emotionally solitary as Jane Bennet, Maria Villiers, Evelina, or Belinda Portman. As Marianne resentfully declares, the sisters' situations 'are alike. We have neither of us any thing to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing' (SS, 170). Austen's chief innovation in her rewriting of the novelistic tradition of the heroine's journey to London is to allow the sisters to articulate their separate distresses to each other while they are still in the capital. Austen thereby creates the kind of powerful novelistic episode which Lovelace can only imagine would ensue from the reunion of Clarissa, in London under his power, and her confidante Anna Howe: 'How sweetly pretty', he writes, 'to see the two lovely friends, when humbled and tame, both sitting in the darkest corner of a room, arm in arm, weeping and sobbing for each other!'<sup>54</sup> Despite their ability to console one another in person (without the distancing mediation

of letters), the kind of sympathetic commiseration Lovelace envisions is denied the Dashwood sisters, as Marianne's self-absorbing despair leaves her unable either to take comfort from Elinor, or to offer her any once she becomes aware of Elinor's disappointment in Edward Ferrars. London is not the place for reconciliations, and Elinor can only look forward 'with hope to what a few months of tranquillity at Barton might do towards restoring Marianne's peace of mind, and confirming her own' (SS, 302).

The metropolis is clearly a dangerous and uncomfortable place for the heroines of Romantic-era fiction. What, then, is their pretext for venturing there? The answer is rooted as much in historical reality as it is in fictional convention. The typical eighteenth-century or Romantic-era heroine is a member of the gentry class, who has either suffered or anticipates suffering an end to her access to the land and money that support her class status.<sup>55</sup> The Dashwood sisters experience this loss early in *Sense and Sensibility*, where it is explained with an unusual level of detail:

The old Gentleman died; his will was read, and like almost every other will, gave as much disappointment as pleasure. He was neither so unjust, nor so ungrateful, as to leave his estate from his nephew; – but he left it to him on such terms as destroyed half the value of the bequest. Mr. Dashwood had wished for it more for the sake of his wife and daughters than for himself or his son: – but to his son, and his son's son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision. (SS, 4)

When, at the conclusion of the first chapter, the estate of Norland and a large part of their family income are lost to the Dashwoods on their father's death, the novel joins, as Edward Copeland writes, 'the disinheritance plots of 1790s fiction in which *Sense and Sensibility* is only one among hundreds of novels to share that pilgrimage'.<sup>56</sup> As Claudia Johnson notes, throughout the recounting of the Dashwoods' complex genealogy and the darkly comic scenes of John and Fanny haggling over how little to offer John's stepmother and half-sisters, readers 'are repeatedly reminded that the patrilineal succession of Norland is at once utterly commonplace and painfully arbitrary'.<sup>57</sup> The disinheritance plot is by its nature highly politicised, emphasising as it does the injustices and failures of the established order to provide for most of its members, the deserving daughters and younger sons – and, by extension, the growing middle classes – whose claims had to be ignored in order to consolidate the wealth and power of the landed gentry and aristocracy. Ruth Perry argues that all the

orphaned women in eighteenth-century fiction are witness to this cutting loose, this great disinheritance, a function of changing legal,

political, and economic systems. Extruded from their consanguineal families and forced to bargain for terms with their potential families by marriage, caught between one system and another, daughters were an early casualty of the effects of capitalism on social relations.<sup>58</sup>

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the threat of disinheritance is the central anxiety motivating the Bennet family, seen most explicitly in Mrs Bennet. Tenaciously clinging to an ideal of fairness alien to eighteenth-century property law, she insists

‘I do think it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure if I had been you [Mr Bennet], I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it.’

Jane and Elizabeth attempted to explain to her the nature of an entail. They had often attempted it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason; and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about. (*PP*, 61–2)

The comic presentation of Mrs Bennet as a character encourages readers not to take her complaints seriously, diffusing the sting of this passage’s social criticism: it is a ‘cruelty’ that six women should face homelessness and relative poverty, and Mrs Bennet is in fact unusually reasonable in saying so. The novel’s ‘light & bright & sparkling’ tone, however, is maintained by the comedy of Mrs Bennet’s near-hysterical pessimism, and by the fact that Mr Bennet seems in good health – rendering his wife’s anxiety ridiculous rather than a sign of desperation (*L*, 212). Austen’s unfinished fragment *The Watsons* presents a very different situation, as Mr Watson’s ill health plainly forbodes his daughters’ further descent into poverty.

It is no surprise that Austen chose to explore the trope of disinheritance in her first novels, not only because of its currency in the politically and ideologically turbulent 1790s, when *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions* were being worked on, but also because of the central reason for that currency: its utility in questioning the value and justice of the existing order. Claudia Johnson claims that *Sense and Sensibility* is ‘the most attuned to progressive social criticism’ of all Austen’s novels, and this could be seen as an almost inescapable consequence of the disinheritance plot.<sup>59</sup> By keeping the threat of disinheritance in the background of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen sustains a level of tension in the novel that would otherwise be absent. Not only is the Bennet sisters’ quest for husbands an unappealingly serious one, but their precarious social status causes unstated friction in their relationships with wealthier men and women,

and with each other. It is a mark of the young novelist's ambition that she selected this much-used but also heavily politicised topos as the starting point for her first full-length works.

The geographic mobility of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* is also the result of their relationship to the disinheritance plot, in which the hero (or more usually heroine) is exiled from a childhood or ancestral home and forced into comparative poverty and isolation, before setting out to regain lost wealth or status. This is achieved either through rediscovery of a parent or evidence of a parent's legitimating marriage, or simply (in the case of heroines) through marriage itself, by which means the protagonist joins a new home and family. *Pride and Prejudice* retains these fictional journeyings (now transformed into tourists' jaunts) as an evocation of conventionalised suffering, but *Sense and Sensibility* follows the conventions fairly straightforwardly. This pattern does much to explain the unusual level of movement in *Sense and Sensibility*. In the course of the novel, the Dashwood sisters travel hundreds of miles from Sussex to Devonshire, then return east to London, before finally settling deep in the West Country. Aside from the outlandish peregrinations of the juvenilia, Marianne and Elinor Dashwood are Austen's most mobile heroines. The novel's subplots share an equal geographic instability: Edward moves desultorily between London, Oxford, Norland, Barton and Plymouth, while the sharper Lucy Steele begins in Exeter and proceeds to move deliberately closer to the source of the coveted Ferrars fortune in London's West End. Colonel Brandon rides around the country searching out first one disgraced Eliza and then another, while his rival Willoughby is recklessly, astonishingly mobile, accomplishing feats such as his 12-hour dash from London to Cleveland in Somerset.<sup>60</sup>

Just as the plot's repetitions of mistaken identities and substitutions emphasise the impersonality of relationships in a society which ranks its members by their exchange value, so does the incessant back-and-forth of the novel's physical movement ironically demonstrate the absence of opportunities, the paucity of places to go. The Dashwoods are at first driven to Barton – 'So far from hence!', Edward expostulates – by the lack of suitably cheap accommodation near Norland (SS, 25). In the isolation of Barton only the prospect of marriage offers any escape from the perpetual endurance of genteel poverty and spinsterhood, but there are scarcely any eligible men in the vicinity. Elinor has left both Norland and Edward together, but until Willoughby arrives Marianne has no one to look to but Brandon, more than twice her age. When all three men converge on London the novel's young women give chase, but the women ultimately return to Devonshire still single (with the telling exception of Lucy Steele) and rather less optimistic than on the journey out.

Here is where Austen's remarkable judgment of the political potential of the novel shows. She resists the impulse of the disinheritance novel

to contradict itself by reordering the entrenched systems of power that it had begun by depicting, by reinstating the birthrights of the young and virtuous in order to construct both reward and conclusion. This may be the fate of Fielding's Tom Jones and Bage's Hermsprong, of Burney's *Evelina*, Smith's *Celestina* and *Emmeline*, and many more; but it is never a solution for Austen. She goes only so far as to allow Mrs Ferrars to un-disown both her sons, and give the still-disinherited Edward one thousand pounds as a wedding present. Instead, Austen treats her characters much like the thing-protagonists of a genre equally marked by social and physical mobility, the eighteenth-century novel of circulation, or It-narrative.

Circulation novels were popular in the early eighteenth century. Charles Gildon's *The Golden Spy* (1709) bases its narrative on the '*Sensibility of Things* which we generally assume not only mute but inanimate', in this case 'some Pieces of coin'd Gold'.<sup>61</sup> Later novels developed an episodic form in which silent, non-human narrators spied on a variety of characters from diverse social stations. The genre has obvious links with picaresque fiction, but this particular incarnation of the picaresque reflected new eighteenth-century anxieties about the growing capitalist economy, in which all kinds of goods and cash itself circulated at unprecedented rates. In Austen's domestic fiction, the objects through which the circulation novel focuses its narrative become not coins or pincushions but women.

In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen eschews one aspect of the circulation novel – that is, the episodic social criticism of different societal characters, which she instead deploys in Elizabeth Bennet's character sketches in *Pride and Prejudice* – but she explores the idea of circulation itself, and the way in which it dehumanises the object circulated. The circulation novel arises out of an economy in which everything is a commodity, to be bought, sold, possessed and perhaps eventually discarded. Significantly, the Dashwood sisters' stay in London is not the pretext for a literary guide to fashionable London life and amusements that novels such as Burney's *Evelina* make out of interludes set in the metropolis. The reader mainly sees the sisters at Mrs Jennings's home, awaiting (or dreading) the arrival of one of the novel's male characters. One feature of London life that is mentioned repeatedly, however, is the 'warehouses', or shops, that characterise the centre of British consumerism.

Marianne's first excursion after Willoughby's brutal severance of their relationship is to 'Gray's in Sackville-street', a jeweller's where 'Elinor was carrying on a negotiation for the exchange of a few old-fashioned jewels of her mother' (SS, 220). As she and her sister are forced to wait over 15 minutes before Elinor can conduct her 'business', the reader can assume that this is likely a politely phrased attempt to convert some of their mother's ornaments (traditionally the most valuable portion of a woman's inheritance) into cash (SS, 221). The sisters are snubbed by the shop's most conspicuous

consumer: 'the correctness of his eye, and the delicacy of his taste, proved to be beyond his politeness' (SS, 220). We later learn that this dandified customer: a man of 'strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion' is Robert Ferrars, the literary descendant of *Evelina*'s pre-eminent fop Mr Lovel (SS, 220–1). In Austen's depiction of London society, however, she deliberately rewrites scenes made famous by Burney's *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, and more recently by Edgeworth's *Belinda*. Whereas the London society of Burney's and Edgeworth's novels meets and mingles at large balls and other scenes of 'public' entertainment such as the opera and Ranelagh gardens, Austen largely ignores such fashionable metropolitan attractions. Significantly, it is in a shop that Elinor first notices her future brother-in-law, and in the same shop that she is reunited with her own half-brother John Dashwood.

What *Evelina* had lightly called going '*a shopping*' becomes in *Sense and Sensibility* a defining feature of London, and the shops themselves have become sites of unintended sociability.<sup>62</sup> In shops, unlike, for example, at Vauxhall, the customer's status is dependent on their perceived purchasing power. By focusing on the explicitly mercantile aspects of the metropolis, rather than the fashionable resorts and entertainments that act as de facto warehouses for eligible partners, Austen dismisses the veil of gentility that novelists and characters alike attempt to throw around their matchmaking machinations. In *Sense and Sensibility*, there is no attempt to deny that commerce is king. Thus Elinor, negotiating an exchange rather than a purchase, ranks below both Robert Ferrars, with his exquisitely elaborate toothpick case, and her brother, who is in the shop to 'bespeak ... a seal' for his wife (SS, 222). As a knowing consumer, John Dashwood estimates all worth in monetary terms. Convinced Elinor has a chance to 'secure' Colonel Brandon, he asks her bluntly,

'What is the amount of his fortune?'

'I believe about two thousand a-year.'

'Two thousand a-year;' and then working himself up to a pitch of enthusiastic generosity, he added, 'Elinor, I wish, with all my heart, it were *twice* as much, for your sake.' (SS, 223, Austen's emphasis)

The callousness of such judgments is soon emphasised by John Dashwood's estimate of his other half-sister's worth. 'She was as handsome a girl last September,' he says, 'as any I ever saw; and as likely to attract the men ... I question whether Marianne *now*,' he continues, 'will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a-year, at the utmost.' Marianne has 'lost her bloom' – she has been shop-soiled by her relationship with Willoughby – and her value is diminished as a result (SS, 227). She and Elinor do not, like the pantomime Dick Whittington, find fame and fortune in London; they are not enriched, but rather damaged, by their visit, and the difficulty

of returning home. Like the lapdog hero of Francis Coventry's *Pompey the Little* (1751) or the eponymous coin in Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), the characters of *Sense and Sensibility* merely circulate, as goods traded in England so often do, from the provinces into London and back again. In this process they are not themselves enriched, but merely worn out a little.

By importing the logic of the circulation novel into the tropes of the novel of disinheritance, Austen cynically denies the latter's idealistic attempts to redress the social and economic wrongs it critiques. Although they begin by decrying an unjust system of wealth distribution, disinheritance novels inevitably conclude with this injustice righted, usually through the altruism of a formerly hard-hearted but fundamentally honest old man. Even in the hands of a radical novelist like Robert Bage this same convention is allowed to play itself out with an inevitability that both resists and compromises the novel's original polemic intent. In *Hermesprong; or Man As He Is Not*, the hero's antagonist, Lord Grondale – uniting in one person a tyrannical father, corrupt politician, vicious landlord and underhand usurper – is allowed a deathbed change of heart: his pathetic last act is to join the hands of his daughter and the rightful heir of his property.<sup>63</sup> In *Sense and Sensibility*, as readers eventually comprehend, Austen forecloses on any such gratuitously happy ending by killing off the unnamed 'old Gentleman', the proprietor of Norland, in her first chapter (SS, 4). Recognising that the disinheritance novel's compulsion to reward its virtuous and sympathetic characters undermines its apparent intention to expose an unjust social order, Austen successfully resists such authorial beneficence in her own work. If the plot of the disinheritance novel enacts the movement from home to exile and back again, a movement towards the consolidation of wealth, the reconciliation of families, and the redemption of the suffering central character, the novel of circulation merely traces an unmeaningly chaotic pattern of circulation itself, without any sense of poetic justice or providential design.

\* \* \* \* \*

It would be an excellent match, for *he* was rich and *she* was handsome.

(SS, 36)

In both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen holds up to scrutiny what is perhaps the single most important convention of the eighteenth-century novel – certainly the convention most central to its political, social and narrative achievements – a convention encompassed in these novels by a single, loaded, word: 'love'. A survivor from medieval romance that persisted unshakably in the novel, it is the very concept

of romance in its nineteenth-, twentieth-century and current sense: the notion of a developing heterosexual relationship between two single people of marriageable – that is, reproductive – age that grows out of their mutual affection for one another; an affection based on the complementary nature of the unique characteristics (physical, moral, emotional, intellectual, financial) of each party; and finding its perfect expression in a socially sanctioned, clerically officiated, legally monitored, monogamous companionate marriage.<sup>64</sup> Such is, baldly stated, the ‘romantic love’ which forms the backbone of the eighteenth-century novel, and informed (and continues to inform) discourse about marriage and other kinds of sexual and romantic relationships.

The discourse of romance creates it at once as the most personal and private of all relationships, and at the same time as a kind of public property, in which the invested, or merely interested, community may and likely shall interfere.<sup>65</sup> ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged,’ writes Austen in her most famous aphorism,

that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters. (*PP*, 3)

In the explicatory second paragraph, the word ‘feelings’ jars with the legalistic phrase ‘rightful property’ while the reiterated ‘truth’ enforces the circular hermeneutic which both invents and assures that what is really a truism in this context, will inevitably make itself into a ‘truth’. It is the offhand ‘some one or other of their daughters’, however, which most betrays the novelistic ideal of romantic love. It is clear at this point – before the reader has been introduced to any characters, and while this statement still exists only in abstract – that any ‘one or other’ daughter will do so long as she enters into ‘the holy estate of Matrimony’.<sup>66</sup>

If *he* is rich and *she* is handsome, that is enough to satisfy the neighbourhood’s – and the novel’s – desire for a wedding. The redistribution of wealth is crucial to the novelised ideal of romantic love, and from *Pamela* to *Pride and Prejudice* rich men are always on hand to rescue deserving, beautiful young women from spinsterish poverty. Of course, many novels see rich young women adding to their wealth through marriage to equally or more wealthy men: the central marriages of *Sir Charles Grandison*, *A Simple Story* and *Emma* are all examples of mutually enriching unions. The latter are in the minority of novels published during the eighteenth century, however, and I have not yet come across a novel in

which a wealthy heiress relieves the undeserved poverty of her worthy, handsome suitor.<sup>67</sup>

The legal and sexual union of wealthy hero and beautiful heroine is the teleological *raison d'être* of romantic fiction, and the dual nature of this union is essential. If *Clarissa* enacts the tragedy of sex unauthorised by marriage, the plots of Burney's *Cecilia* and *The Wanderer* are both partly dependent on the ambiguous status of sexually unconsummated marriages.<sup>68</sup> Austen satirises the novel's compulsion towards its protagonists' weddings again and again in her fiction: 'my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity' (NA, 250); 'I purposely abstain from dates ... exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier' (MP, 470); etc. In fact, both of these quotations and those of similar ilk in Austen's other novels represent some of the only moments in the novels in which the narrator's 'I' is revealed, simultaneously taunting the reader and scolding his or her impatience for the conventional 'happily ever after'. This narrative intrusion suggests that to Austen's mind, all readers possess elements of Mrs Elton's character, complaining of her novels' lack of romantic gratification, too little literary 'white satin' (E, 484). As we have seen, the double-wedding conclusion of *Sense and Sensibility* is troublingly anticlimactic, but in its sister-text *Pride and Prejudice*, the same double-wedding trope becomes the model of fictional romantic pleasure – the utmost delight that can be represented, short of nauseating hyperbole. Elizabeth writes of her sister: 'I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh' (PP, 383).

Elizabeth's laughter is the key to her character, and to the unprecedented generic innovation she represents. As several critics have recognised, Elizabeth Bennet has forerunners in stage heroines such as Shakespeare's Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*, or Kate Hardcastle of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Penny Gay has discovered Elizabeth's resemblance to Roxalana, the heroine of Isaac Bickerstaff's 1775 play *The Sultan*, a comedy performed by the Austen family at Steventon in 1789.<sup>69</sup> Austen calls Elizabeth 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print', and it is a simple enough task to identify her printed sisters, such as Richardson's Anna Howe and Charlotte Grandison, or Bage's Miss Fluart (L, 210). None of these fictional women, however, had ever played more than a supporting role in a novel. To take centre stage, a novel's heroine had to be more (and less) than witty and flirtatious. She had to be perfect.

The perfect heroine was the eighteenth-century novel's solution to the problem of its assumed readership, a kind of prophylactic in case of readerly quixotism. The reception of novels from *The History of Betsey Thoughtless* to *The Hunger Games* has been hampered by an apparently irrepressible fear that novel readers are girls, that girls are stupid, and

that girls, being stupid, will be influenced by the novels they read to a disproportionate and potentially dangerous extent.<sup>70</sup> Eighteenth-century novelists responded to this fear by creating heroines so perfect that no imitation of them, however quixotic, could possibly lead to harm or bad behaviour. As Clara Reeve puts it: 'no harm can possibly arise from the imitation of a perfect character, though the attempt should fall short of the original'.<sup>71</sup> The heroines of novels offered readers the model way to behave in every conceivable situation; they are their readers' moral guide and guardian. Not only is the eighteenth-century novel's heroine 'all over loveliness', but

with all this reigning good-nature visible in her face and manner, there is such a native dignity in all she says, in all she does (tho' mingled with a frankness that shews her mind's superiority to the minds of almost all other women) that it damps and suppresses, in the most audacious, all imaginations of bold familiarity.<sup>72</sup>

Along with physical faultlessness and sweetness of disposition, this 'native dignity' is the essential constituent feature of the novel's heroine. The 'dignity and purity' of Hannah More's idealised heroine 'encrease[s] ... passion' in her lovers – it 'transport[s]' and 'cure[s]' them.<sup>73</sup> References to a heroine's 'dignity' recur in Richardson's novels, in relation to Harriet Byron, above, or to Clarissa or Pamela, and also in the novels of Bage, Burney, Smith, Edgeworth, Brunton, West, Radcliffe, Scott and Henry Fielding.

Dignity is an attribute that seems as if it might be drawn directly from conduct literature. In *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* the Reverend John Gregory instructs his young readers to 'Converse with men ... with that dignified modesty, which may prevent the approach of the most distant familiarity'.<sup>74</sup> In novels this strategy is usually successful in establishing the reverence of the hero, or keeping the anti-hero at bay: the heroine of Radcliffe's *The Italian* assumes 'an air of dignity, which repressed [a] rude presumption'.<sup>75</sup> This literally awe-inspiring dignity, however, was not derived from conduct literature – on the contrary, monitors of young women's behaviour seem to have adopted a concept that was an essential attribute of feminine heroism as far back as romances and prototypical novels. Imoinda, the heroine of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), an African princess sold into slavery in Suriname, is courted by slaves and slave-owners alike but, as one testifies, 'she deny[s] us all with such a noble Disdain, that 'tis a Miracle to see, that she, who can give such eternal Desires, shou'd herself be all Ice, and all Unconcern'. In fact, 'so great an Awe does she strike into the Hearts of her Admirers' that even those who hold absolute authority over her are unable to exploit her sexually.<sup>76</sup>

Charlotte Lennox mocks exaggerated heroinely hauteur in *The Female Quixote*, her heroine outlining

‘criminal Favours, such as allowing Persons to talk to you of Love; not forbidding them to write to you; giving them Opportunities of being alone with you for several Moments together; and several other Civilities of the like Nature, which no Man can possibly merit, under many Years Services, Fidelity, and Pains: All these are criminal Favours, and highly blameable in a Lady, who has any regard for her Reputation.’

Here Lennox represents highly wrought heroic dignity as ‘romantic’ in the negative eighteenth-century sense. Her heroine’s exacting standards are ridiculous, and Arabella is eccentric for expecting such behaviour from her own suitors. She is, moreover, at fault for failing to observe the more typical expectations of dignified propriety. When her more worldly cousin responds that ‘All these ... are nothing in Comparison of making them Visits; and no Woman, who has any Reputation at all, will be guilty of taking such Liberties,’ we gain a fuller picture of what is at stake in Elizabeth’s sightseeing trip to Pemberley.<sup>77</sup> For the most part, however, and with the exception of one or two quixotic *faux pas*, Arabella behaves with the gravity and dignity we would anticipate from any heroine. But for her delusions, indeed, she is a pattern heroine, in the same mould as Clarissa, Belinda or Cecilia.

The inescapable proliferation of dignified heroines in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels is no accident, just as the number of novels which take their heroine’s name for their title – *Clarissa*, *Belinda*, *Cecilia* – is not necessarily a sign of their authors’ lack of creativity. In this period, the novel’s heroine and the novel itself were so closely identified that the dignity and gravity of heroines were essential to the dignity and gravity of the novel itself. Just as their young fictional women rely on dignity to defend them against attack – and deprived of wit, daring and pistols a grave manner is usually the only weapon available to heroines – so does the perfectly dignified heroine defend the legitimacy of the novel. The heroine must take herself seriously, that is, in order for the fictional world of the novel to support itself, that the reader might suspend disbelief. An undignified heroine might spell fictional anarchy.

In her juvenilia, Austen revels in just such anarchy, with heroines who ardently pursue indifferent young men, drink to excess, murder their rivals and king-hit unfortunate pastry cooks. Sophia of ‘Love and Freindship’ ‘who though naturally all winning sweetness could when occasions demanded it call forth the Dignity of her Sex’ only does so when caught stealing from her host (*MW*, 96). Attempts to pursue the key adjectives of novelistic heroism – ‘dignified’ and ‘grave’ – are frustrated by Austen’s mature novels. It is Mr Knightley who speaks and looks gravely, not Emma.

Fanny Price admits 'I suppose I am graver than other people' (MP, 197), but in *Northanger Abbey* the dogma of dignified heroineship is invoked only to show that Catherine behaves in an opposite fashion. When Henry snubs her at a play,

Catherine was restlessly miserable; she could almost have run round to the box in which he sat, and forced him to hear her explanation. Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her; instead of considering her own dignity injured by this ready condemnation – instead of proudly resolving, in conscious innocence, to shew her resentment towards him who could harbour a doubt of it ... she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause. (NA, 93)

Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Austen contrasts Catherine's attitudes and behaviour with those we might expect from a typical heroine, a concern she seems to revisit in *Sanditon*. In both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, however, Austen plays with a different novelistic convention, that of paired or contrasting female characters.

This convention, which is a crucial attribute of many novels right up to the Modernist period, and persists in contemporary film, can be traced back to *The Spectator*, or Shakespeare (*The Taming of the Shrew's* conclusion, for instance), or even earlier to the biblical wise and foolish virgins.<sup>78</sup> In novels the convention usually takes the form of the wise heroine and her foil, a sort of literary bridesmaid, beside whom the heroine shines in luminous perfection. These supporting characters vary far more than their insipid counterparts. They can be thoughtless flirts, emasculating wits or sentimental fools. They are, quite frequently, novel-readers themselves. In a particularly didactic novel, such a character might end badly – if she ends well it is usually despite her behaviour.

A particularly gruesome episode from medical history illustrates the dominance of this novelistic convention. In 1829, when they were six months old, the Sardinian parents of conjoined twins Ritta and Christina Parodi took them to Paris, where the Parodis hoped to exhibit their daughters for money. This was prohibited on the grounds of public decency, and the family was left to starve. When winter set in the weaker Ritta died, Christina following a few minutes later. Immediately the physicians who had declined to visit the girls when they were living snatched up the corpse for dissection and display – their remains can apparently still be seen in the *Galerie de paléontologie et d'anatomie comparée* in Paris. At the time, the writer Jules Janin suggested that the sisters would make an excellent fictional subject. In this projected novel, the reimagined Parodis are not impoverished, but monied. Most improbably in conjoined twins, Christina is blonde, while Ritta is a brunette. Christina is the good, fair, dignified, noble-minded

heroine; Ritta her sullen, over-emotional foil. When the sisters reach the properly heroic age of 17, the hero falls in love with Christina. Overcome with jealousy, Ritta falls ill, precipitating the tragic deaths of both sisters, and the hero's despair.<sup>79</sup>

Janin's novel, thankfully, was never written. His is an extreme version of the device of paired heroines. More usually, in order to emphasise the dignity and gravity of their heroine, authors set up for comparison a flightier, sometimes funnier sidekick – a character who is permitted much of the wit and comedy denied the dignified heroine. This is true of Anna Howe, Clarissa Harlowe's best friend, or Miss Fluart in Bage's *Hermesprong*. In *Tom Jones* Fielding has Harriet Fitzpatrick explicitly perform the comparison between herself and the novel's heroine:

'I never reflect without sorrow on those days (the happiest far of my life) which we spent together when both were under the care of my aunt Western. Alas! why are Miss Graveairs and Miss Giddy no more. You remember, I am sure, when we knew each other by no other names. Indeed you gave the latter appellation with too just cause. I have since experienced how much I deserved it. You, my Sophia, was always my superior in everything.'<sup>80</sup>

The first novel to truly contest this tired pairing, and to dislodge 'Miss Graveairs' from her position as unassailably perfect heroine, is *Pride and Prejudice*. The beautiful elder sister Jane Bennet, as one of the novel's first readers recognised, is the more likely heroine. Mary Russell Mitford complained that

it is impossible not to feel in every line of 'Pride and Prejudice', in every word of 'Elizabeth', the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. Wickham is equally bad. Oh! They were just fit for each other, and I cannot forgive that delightful Darcy for parting them. Darcy should have married Jane.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the novel, Jane behaves in the manner expected of the heroines of Romantic novels. She is beautiful, dignified, free from suspecting the motives of others, almost endlessly forgiving, prone to illness, long-suffering, blameless, quiet, smiling. She reacts to the stock tribulations of fiction with anticipated resignation, private sorrow and the consciousness that 'all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets, which must have been injurious to her own health and their tranquillity' (*PP*, 227). The physically robust, confident, sharp-eyed Elizabeth, however, as critical of others as she is of her own failings, literally laughs at misfortune and ill-treatment. When she is slighted in

a ballroom, for instance, instead of being mortified like Evelina and Belinda before her, she tells 'the story ... with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous' (PP, 12). At the novel's conclusion, Elizabeth's unheroically vivacity is stressed once more: 'I am happier even than Jane' she writes to her aunt, 'she only smiles, I laugh' (PP, 383).

Elizabeth's happy laughter is so satisfying to readers as to make them resist any attempt at analysis. Austen's laughter, however, is very different to that of her heroine. Austen laughs at the careless reader's expense, and her text demands the kind of close reading, and rereading, that threatens to deny the reader the simple pleasures promised by romantic fiction. When accused of being 'a great reader' who has 'no pleasure in any thing else', Elizabeth responds, 'I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things' (PP, 37). The relationship between pleasure and reading is at the heart of Austen's project in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. As I have argued earlier in this chapter, the potential reading pleasures of *Sense and Sensibility* are all but annihilated by the weight of its allusions and contributing texts. This stifling literary scaffolding constantly reminds readers of the novel's fictionality and – what is worse – the depressing predictability of all such fiction. Not only does *Sense and Sensibility* resist giving its readers the pleasure promised by romantic fiction: it also threatens to strip that pleasure from the entire genre.

*Pride and Prejudice* has an almost opposite effect. Austen's mock-complaint that the novel was 'too light & bright & sparkling' seems a valid criticism in light of *Sense and Sensibility's* pessimistic tone.<sup>82</sup> It seems almost impossible that the two texts could have been produced by the same author, let alone an author working on both texts almost simultaneously. The 'light & bright & sparkling' tone of *Pride and Prejudice* seems to preclude the kinds of criticism levelled at the genre of the novel by *Sense and Sensibility*. Austen, nevertheless, never abandons her fundamentally critical relationship with the novel in *Pride and Prejudice*. Whereas in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen had demonstrated the fictional uses of literary criticism, in *Pride and Prejudice* she turns the novel itself into an exercise in critical reading.

*First Impressions*, then, remains an appropriate title for the published novel. It is the reader's first impressions, however, rather than Elizabeth Bennet's, that demand the most consideration. John Wiltshire has pointed out Austen's revolutionary use of misremembered conversations in the novel: noting that Elizabeth recalls Darcy's 'boasting ... of the implacability of his resentments, of his having an unforgiving temper', whereas the words 'implacable resentment' were – as the reader, or rather rereader, may confirm – Elizabeth's own (PP, 80, 58).<sup>83</sup>

Another easily forgotten conversation threatens to destabilise the happiness even of Darcy's successful proposal scene. 'He expressed himself on the occasion', writes Austen, 'as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently

in love can be supposed to do' (PP, 366). The phrase 'violently in love' is used deliberately, even mischievously, to emphasise that the narrative is adhering to untrustworthy convention. The exact same phrase has been discussed earlier in the novel by Elizabeth and Mrs Gardiner, the latter pronouncing it 'so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite ... as often applied to feelings which arise from an half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment' (PP, 140–1). Readers caught up in the pleasures of romance will inevitably forget the phrase's early dismissal, and read it as a straightforward simile of Darcy's unrepresentable passion, rather than as a misleading cliché. Such tricks played on the reader threaten, if not to destabilise the text itself, certainly to mar the pleasure of its reading. Just as the author of *Sense and Sensibility*, however, taught her readers to see through the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, so too does the author of *Pride and Prejudice* demand her readers mistrust what they read *even as they read it*. Austen forces her readers to pay attention to the artifice of the novel – that is, not any novel, but this novel in particular, *Pride and Prejudice* – and to try to remain aware of their suspension of disbelief.

Largely through the use of free indirect speech, Austen maintains a conscious tension in the novel between the fictionalising novel-readers are accustomed to (the kind that is supported by the suspension of disbelief) and the self-consciousness that illuminates the text's fictionality, thereby undermining its claims to realism and threatening the suspension of disbelief. At the core of this technique is Austen's incessant ironising of her readers' emotional investment in the novel's plot. In this novel of mistaken first impressions, of misreadings of character, Austen demands her readers be constantly alert to the 'appearance of ... goodness' (PP, 295).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen repeatedly emphasises the difficulty even good readers of character have in performing their readings. Elizabeth misjudges first Darcy, then Wickham, and even her old friend Charlotte Lucas, while Darcy's misinterpretation of the behaviour of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet embarrasses him and leads to the prevention of an engagement between Jane and Bingley that Elizabeth had believed inevitable. Austen stresses that Elizabeth is 'not a great reader', either of books or of people, while interrogating the educative or moralising potential of her own text by insisting, like Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, that she 'will not allow books to prove any thing' (PP, 37; P, 234). Unlike in *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma* and to a lesser extent *Sense and Sensibility*, actual titles of books are not mentioned in *Pride and Prejudice*, with the exception of Mr Collins's holiday reading, James Fordyce's *Sermons*. Provoked into conversation at the Netherfield ball, Darcy asks Elizabeth, 'What think you of books?', to which she responds, 'Books – Oh! no. – I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings ... I cannot talk of books in a ball-room' (PP, 93). By consciously displacing the role of books as shorthand guides

to character, Austen draws attention to the assumptions made by readers *within* the novel (such as Darcy and Elizabeth), as well as readers *of* the novel. What Austen ultimately questions is the function of reading itself, and the kinds of value ascribed by readers to their reading material – that is, their critical abilities.

At the conclusion of the novel's final proposal scene, Elizabeth refrains from making fun of Darcy: 'She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laught at, and it was rather too early to begin' (*PP*, 371). Perhaps, as Austen's readers, this is still our greatest fault. We have not yet learned to laugh at ourselves, either at our insufficient readerly abilities, or at the persistence of our desire for a love story that gets in the way of reading the words on the page. Until we do learn to laugh at ourselves and our critical shortcomings, however, we can only enjoy half the pleasures that Austen offers us.

## 4

### ‘A Good Spot for Fault-Finding’: Reading Criticism in *Mansfield Park*

You may be assured I read every line with the greatest interest & am more delighted with it than my humble pen can express. The excellent delineation of Character, sound sense, Elegant Language & the pure morality with which it abounds, makes it a most desirable as well as useful work, & reflects the highest honour &c. &c. – Universally admired in Edinburgh, by all the *wise ones*. – Indeed, I have not heard a single fault given to it

‘Opinions of *Mansfield Park*’ (MW, 433)

The first of Austen’s novels to be begun and completed in the nineteenth century, *Mansfield Park*, demonstrates Austen’s ongoing preoccupation with the literature of the eighteenth century. Just as importantly, the novel evinces Austen’s interest in the rapidly changing nature of literary culture in England. Bakhtin argues that ‘when the novel becomes the dominant genre ... almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent “novelized”’, and this cooption of other genres to the services of the novel lies at the heart of Austen’s work.<sup>1</sup> In *Mansfield Park* Austen takes on once again the question of what belongs, or does not belong, in a novel. In *Sense and Sensibility* she focused on the issue of representation, that is, the limitations of what could be shown in a novel. In *Mansfield Park* Austen turns to the equally important question of genre, exploring the novel’s potential to reflect on, cannibalise and transform not only other novels, but also oral legend, epic poetry and biography.

The image of Austen’s splendid isolation, of her immaculate literary conception (springing fully formed with lace cap and goose-quill pen from the head, perhaps, of Dr Johnson), has been exploded by decades of excellent scholarship, and needs little further refutation. In this chapter I hope not merely to tease out some of the literary influences to be found in *Mansfield Park*, but primarily to discuss how Austen’s use of other texts contributes to her understanding and development of the novel. Beginning

with an examination of Fanny Price's reading behaviour, and how this relates to Austen's own literary practices in *Mansfield Park*, this chapter will focus on the ways in which the boundaries between literary genres are ineptly policed in the novel, and occasionally broken down altogether. Austen's use in *Mansfield Park* of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is exemplary of this process, and also raises questions about Austen's feminist critical practices in relation to women's writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. All of these critical explorations demonstrate the ways in which, for Austen, the novel was a genre both important and adaptable enough to encompass many literary forms, and in so doing to transform them.

In Chapter 2 we saw that Austen's realism is often achieved through an artistic process that actually excludes aspects of reality. While such realism endures as one of her paramount artistic aims, for Austen the novel as a *genre* is defined not by what it excludes, but by what it includes. The boundaries that divide the novel from the genres of romance, from poetry, or from parody, are, for Austen, all limitlessly permeable. Themes, characters, phrases and situations indigenous to one form of literature cross the borders into Austen's novels with ease, and are there deftly assimilated into the roles demanded by the novelistic form. Principally for Austen, this assimilating process entails a refashioning of the foreign generic element so that it meets her test of probability, and can then be exploited to serve the ends of her own, new-made fiction.

Far from being unique to Austen's works, this strategy of including in fiction the language and episodes of poetry, political commentary and other literary forms, was frequently employed by novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By borrowing from genres external to the novel – and, to a lesser extent, from other novels – the novelists of this period attempted first to assert, and ultimately to define, the novel as a genre. Often the very act of declaring the novel's legitimacy as a genre was made with reference to forms of literature such as classical epic, religious texts, lyric poetry or (mostly Shakespearean) drama: genres whose respectable, canonical status might be helpful in enhancing the novel's standing with contemporary readers and critics.

What sets Austen's practice apart from that of her contemporaries is the use she makes of this allusive strategy. She does not deploy frequent quotations in order to inflate her novel's gravitas; to assert its political, literary or philosophical kudos; or to advertise her own wide reading, as is the tendency of writers as diverse as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Mary Hays, Ann Radcliffe and Walter Scott. Rather, Austen's literary references are used as much to demonstrate the ways in which her characters' thoughts are led by their remembered reading into predetermined pathways (such as when, like Anne Elliot, they 'fall into a quotation' [P, 85]), as they are used to embed Austen's own fiction in an extended literary tradition. The tentativeness – and in some egregious cases, deliberate blindness – with

which critics of Jane Austen tend to respond to the presence of outside literary influences in her novels can be excused – to an extent – by the way in which, by integrating their traces so deeply into the text, she renders them deliberately obscure or ambivalent. This has been a boon to Austen's posthumous fame, by ensuring that her novels are legible to a vast majority of readers without access to the literature with which she engages in her fiction, much of which either continues out of print, or is available only in well-resourced academic libraries. While it is possible that Austen had the immediate marketability of her novels in view in employing this system of covert quotation, the liberal borrowing from literary sources carried out by Austen's contemporaries suggests that the accessibility of her novels to the narrowly read was not a strong influence on her own methods.

Austen's superficially self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek comment to the Prince Regent's librarian that 'I may boast myself to be ... the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress' (*L*, 319) also serves as a reminder that in the repressive social and political climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a woman's knowledge, once acquired, ought not to be openly displayed. 'A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing,' the narrator wryly comments in *Northanger Abbey*, 'should conceal it as well as she can' (*NA*, 111). Eighteenth-century authors, at least, took care to emphasise their heroines' modest concealment of their inevitably prodigious learning.

Seeming belatedly to regret the precocity of his ideal heroine, Richardson added a caveat to *Clarissa Harlowe's* accomplishments in the third edition of *Clarissa*. This editorial insertion has Anna Howe describe – rather disingenuously, as any reader of *Clarissa's* correspondence must conclude – reticence as one of her friend's attractions: 'Altho' she was well re'd in the English, French, and Italian Poets, and had re'd the best translations of the Latin Classics; yet seldom did she quote or repeat from them, either in her Letters or Conversation.'<sup>2</sup> As Leah Price points out, 'Anna's historical revisionism' – which of course is also Richardson's – 'comes too late to be credible, for quotations riddle *Clarissa's* letters, and the rape causes her to substitute quotation for narration altogether.'<sup>3</sup> The unobtrusive nature of Austen's literary allusions may be seen, then, as a pre-emptive defence against imputations of unladylike pedantry or exhibitionism. Fanny Price certainly tends to recite her quotations 'in a low voice' (*MP*, 56, 85). The eponymous pedant of Walter Scott's 1816 novel *The Antiquary* suggests that male writers could be forgiven virtuosic or even tedious displays of learning, provided they couched such displays in a self-deprecatingly comic framework. Austen's contemporary Germaine de Staël, however, warned that 'when women write, the public, generally assuming that the primary motive is to show their cleverness, only reluctantly bestows its approval'.<sup>4</sup>

Austen's unostentatious use of quotation and allusion also sets her apart from those of her contemporary novelists who tend to wear their poetic

motatoes and other literary allusions on their sleeves. Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, for instance, is immediately recognisable as a novel with sympathies for the radical politics of the French Revolution by its frequent references to Rousseau, Helvétius, Descartes, Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Maria Edgeworth's conservative novel *Belinda*, in comparison, borrows explicitly from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, thereby emphasising the novel's rationalist, Enlightenment politics, along with the trivial, girlish nature of her unflappable heroine's minor difficulties.<sup>5</sup> Austen, however, rarely signposts her use of the texts she weaves into her fiction. As D. A. Miller has recognised, Austen's is the art that – often disturbingly – conceals art,<sup>6</sup> yet it is important to recognise that such concealment achieves political, as well as artistic, aims. For Austen, effacing the overt signs of her literary debts has a similar effect to her customary ironic tone, as she keeps her readers guessing.

Nevertheless, Austen's own analysis of a highly developed reading practice, and its shortcomings, is available to readers of *Mansfield Park*. In writing of Edmund Bertram's supplementary education of Fanny Price, the narrator explains that his 'attentions' were of

the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures. He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself. Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (MP, 22)

Rousseau-inspired projects in which young men educate younger girls, thereby preparing for their own enjoyment dutiful and loving wives, do not always end well in conservative fiction. Such an attempt backfires on *Belinda's* hero Clarence Harvey, when both he and the young rustic he has been grooming fall in love with partners that Edgeworth represents as more suitable to their respective social positions. Edmund Bertram, although unwittingly, is far more successful in his attempt to train up a suitable wife, and in return for his 'services' Fanny 'loved him better than any body in the world' (MP, 22).

Edmund's tutelage of Fanny, however, is only one area in which *Mansfield Park* participates in what Marilyn Butler has called 'the war of ideas', the great ideological and critical battles of the day. The role of the individual within the family, and the political identification of the family as a microcosmic nation, are themes common to ideologically driven texts such as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Mary Wollstonecraft's

responses to it, Charlotte Smith's polemic novel *The Old Manor House*, Hannah More's didactic *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, Maria Edgeworth's critically acclaimed *Patronage* and Frances Burney's critically lambasted *The Wanderer*. Austen's sustained study of a country baronet's family allows her to enter into these debates in a nuanced and strategic fashion, allowing her text to find fault with conservative ideological positions, and to suggest with great subtlety alternative perspectives that, in the year before Waterloo, are still dangerously radical.

\* \* \* \* \*

'I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price,' said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. 'Pray, is she out, or is she not? – I am puzzled. – She dined at the parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being *out*; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she *is*.'

Edmund, to whom this was chiefly addressed, replied, 'I believe I know what you mean – but I will not undertake to answer the question.'

(MP, 48–9, Austen's emphasis)

Much of what has been regarded as the difficulty of *Mansfield Park* centres on the character of Fanny herself. I leave aside for the moment the responses Fanny provokes in readers: that she has been called a 'prig', a 'cringing' 'monster' and a 'problem' by irritated critics,<sup>7</sup> and the reasons Austen may have had for rendering her heroine so unlikeable to so many. It is important to recognise that Fanny serves many functions in *Mansfield Park*, and that one of them is that of the outsider who is inside, or the insider forced to live on the borders, viewing the goings on in the centre of Mansfield Park from a perspective that is always marginal, and yet more fully informed than that of those who imagine themselves to be the principal actors. In this, Fanny's initial position is less like that of a typical heroine than that of a passionate reader – one who, desperately interested in the actions of a few characters, is for the most part powerless to interfere. Fanny says of herself, 'I cannot act': she can only observe (MP, 145).

Fanny is of course (like most readers) in no way a disinterested or dispassionate observer, just as the occasional intrusions into the story by the disembodied voice of the narrator reveal it to be no impartial relator of facts in the third person. It is a consequence, not only of Austen's use of free indirect discourse, but of the ambiguities of the text itself, that it is not always possible to distinguish between Fanny's words, those of the narrator, and the impressions made in the mind of the reader. These contradictions and difficulties are, to a great extent, embodied by Fanny. The awkward and

only partially reconcilable positions in which Fanny finds herself throughout the novel can be recognised in Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *la mestiza*, a character that exists not despite, but rather *through*, her inability to inhabit the defined spaces within the borders of nation, gender, language, race or sexuality. 'The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity ... [s]he learns to juggle cultures,' Anzaldúa explains. 'She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode ... not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambiguities into something else.'<sup>8</sup> The answer to Mary Crawford's question is, that Fanny is at once 'out' and 'not out'; she is at the same time a member of the family at Mansfield, a servant, and neither.

Fanny also has a corollary in *Mansfield Park*'s recognisable prototype plot, Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*. In that novel the servant Monimia is surreptitiously educated by the putative heir of the Manor, who further challenges her subordinate status by falling in love with her during their secret midnight trysts in the library. Books are a source of anxiety to Monimia, as she must conceal her literacy from her aunt and Mrs Rayland, the imperious proprietor of the Manor. Books thus become a sign of Monimia's forbidden love, as well as of her covert movements to exceed her servant status. Once her illiteracy is overcome, Monimia can begin to fulfil her destined role as heroine.

The connections between *Mansfield Park* and *The Old Manor House* are well articulated by Jacqueline Labbe in her recent essay 'Narrating Seduction: Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen'. There is no need to go over ground already covered by Labbe, particularly in her identification of Fanny Price with Smith's servant-heroine Monimia; Mrs Norris with Monimia's aunt (and possibly mother), the housekeeper Mrs Lennard; and Edmund with Smith's rather ineffectual hero Orlando Somerive. Labbe clearly demonstrates that *Mansfield Park* had at least part of its 'genesis' in Austen's reading of *The Old Manor House*, and that she relied to some extent on Smith's novel 'to inform and shape' her own.<sup>9</sup> One aspect of Smith's novel deserves special attention, however, because of the way Austen draws on it in her own text. *The Old Manor House* explicitly deals with the concept of chivalric ideology and its intrusion into modern-day politics, in a manner that extends beyond a counter to the sentiments expressed by Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Burke's medievalist tendencies were criticised by his less conservative contemporaries, who must have seen, particularly in his notorious description of the capture of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, gothic melodrama to rival Ann Radcliffe or Sophia Lee. 'History will record,' writes Burke,

that on the morning of the 6th of October 1789, the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in

a few hours of respite, and troubled melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the centinel at her door, who cried out to her, to save herself by flight – that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give – that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment.<sup>10</sup>

Objective journalism this is not. Mary Wollstonecraft's response to Burke tellingly locates his romanticised depiction of the Revolution in fashionable discourse. 'Sensibility is the *manie* of the day,' she writes, addressing Burke directly, 'and compassion the virtue which is to cover a multitude of vices, whilst justice is left to mourn in sullen silence, and balance truth in vain.' She goes on:

I perceive, from the whole tenor of your Reflections, that you have a mortal antipathy to reason; but, if there is any thing like argument, or first principles, in your wild declamation, behold the result: – that we are to reverence the rust of antiquity, and term the unnatural customs, which ignorance and mistaken self-interest have consolidated, the sage fruit of experience: nay, that, if we do discover some errors, our *feelings* should lead us to excuse, with blind love, or unprincipled filial affection, the venerable vestiges of ancient days. These are gothic notions of beauty – the ivy is beautiful, but, when it insidiously destroys the trunk from which it receives support, who would not grub it up?<sup>11</sup>

Two years later, Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* took up the arguments raised by Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Smith's focus in her novel is mainly on the fallacy of tradition and custom, by which those who inherit wealth and power mask their inveterate abuse of their position in order to consolidate that wealth and power. Smith's novel provided Austen with a fairly robust prototype for transposing Wollstonecraft's debate with Burke into fiction, so it is worth analysing Smith's practice in some depth. Recognising Austen's responses to the ideological debate led by Burke and Wollstonecraft, and to its fictionalisation by Smith, is central to understanding the way in which Austen uses texts that have already been mediated by other texts.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Old Manor House*, concepts of chivalry operate as a powerful, dangerous and deceptive motivating factor. Whereas in *Mansfield Park* it is Fanny whose thinking is influenced by images of knights and

ruined abbeys, in Smith's novel it is the very old-fashioned, deluded Mrs Rayland, proprietor of the eponymous house, whose imagination dwells in her ancestors' knightly past, and whose romantic fancy leads her to encourage her beloved nephew Orlando to attempt what she sees as an heroic quest. Smith is at pains to point out the very modern, corrupt, capitalist motives that are actually responsible for the war Orlando goes off to fight, and the inglorious conditions in which the war itself is conducted.

Mrs Rayland is blinded to reality by her obsession with her family's martial and courtly importance in the distant past. Her preoccupation with the ancestral Orlandos for whom Smith's hero is named leads her to confuse him with them, and is presented, not as the quaint habit of an elderly lady, but as a dangerous and contemptible delusion. Even her spelling is pompous and Elizabethan, inspiring only derision in her addressees, whether or not their opinions are veiled by their self-interested sycophancy. In Mrs Rayland, Smith clearly articulates the dangers and absurdities of applying medieval attitudes to present-day problems, and questions the rhetoric of 'heroism' and 'patriotism'. During Orlando's voyage across the Atlantic, Smith voices her criticisms of the exploitatively capitalist – and certainly not romantic – basis of war:

[Orlando] endeavoured to persuade himself that it was for glory: he had been taught to love glory – What so sacred as the glory of his country? To purchase it no exertion could be too great – to revenge any insult on it, no sacrifice should be regretted. If, for a moment, his good sense arose in despite of this prejudice, and induced him to enquire if it was not from a mistaken point of honour, from the wickedness of governments, or the sanguinary ambition or revenge of monarchs, that so much misery was owing as wars of every description must necessarily occasion; he quieted these doubts by recurring to history – our Henries and our Edwards, heroes whose names children are taught to lisp with delight, as they are bid to execrate the cruel Uncle and the bloody Queen Mary; and he tried to believe that what these English Kings had so gloriously done, was in their descendants equally glorious, because it went to support the honour of the British name.<sup>13</sup>

With annotations that directly compare Orlando's experience with that of soldiers at war with France in the 1790s (contemporary with the time of writing) and the treatment of slaves, Smith emphasises war's cruelty and corruption.<sup>14</sup> She denies any possibility of chivalric 'glory'. Orlando is never given much chance to fight. He is ill when he reaches America, and although he is exposed there to fresh evidence of war's horrors – burnt-out villages, at one point a set of 11 fresh scalps – he spends the next many months a prisoner of either the Iroquois or the French, finally returning penniless to

England only to find Mrs Rayland and his father dead, his beloved Monimia missing, and the old manor house deserted.

One striking aspect of the passage above is the gulf Smith sets up between Orlando's thought processes and the opinions endorsed by the narrator. This strategy allows Smith to at once demonstrate the sentimental, conventional thinking that has misled Orlando and many of his countrymen into war, while simultaneously presenting her criticism of such thinking. Refiguring historic military heroes such as Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great as 'murderers', Smith's narrator articulates the creed that history ought to be judged by contemporary standards of morality, rather than being used to justify modern abuses. This is one of the most powerful and impressive political statements in *The Old Manor House*, and in Smith's fiction more widely.

Austen's attitude towards the often shadowy intrusions historical knowledge makes into living consciousnesses is less condemnatory, more ambiguous, and far more obscure than what we find in Smith's clear-sighted polemic. For Smith, there is a gulf between romanticised history and realistic political commentary, and while both can exist in the text of her novel, it is only so that delusion may dramatically give way to truth. There is a division also, in *The Old Manor House*, between novelistic narration and more overt political commentary. In writing about the political and financial machinations underpinning the war between Britain and the breakaway colonies, for instance, Smith writes:

that the ministry should, in thus purchasing glory, put a little more than was requisite into the pockets of the contractors, and destroy as many men by sickness as by the sword, made but little difference in an object so infinitely important; especially when it was known (which, however, Orlando did not know) that messieurs the contractors were for the most part members of parliament, who under other names enjoyed the profits of a war, which, disregarding the voices of the people in general, or even of their own constituents, they voted for pursuing.<sup>15</sup>

The narrator's parenthetical explanation that Orlando 'did not know' the extent to which the war is being carried on for the profit of its instigators emphasises his impotence – Orlando may be the novel's protagonist, but he is certainly not much of a hero. In this passage Smith identifies Orlando with the actual soldiers of an historic event, while cynically pointing to the ongoing corruptions of the self-serving governing class. Orlando's ignorance, however, raises this opinion, which belongs both to the narrator and to Smith, above the more intimate concerns of the novel, and at the same time distances the statement from the novel's world. Smith keeps her polemic distinct from the remainder of the novel's text, a strategy that at once keeps her opinion immutable and

intact, while ensuring her readers understand the message in the moral of her story.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen divides Smith's character Orlando between Edmund, who takes Orlando's place in the plot structure, and Fanny, who combines Orlando's role as protagonist with Monimia's marginal social status. To Fanny is also ascribed Orlando's secret, forbidden and slightly obsessive love for a childhood playmate, and her relationship with literature likewise resembles that of Smith's bookish hero. For Fanny books are a rare repository of personal autonomy and privacy, as well as a cipher through which she can safely express (if only to herself) her love for her cousin Edmund. Reading is one of the few activities that Fanny enjoys without guilt. Only the barest skeleton of the books that charm Fanny's 'leisure hours' are catalogued in *Mansfield Park*, and then only briefly, when Edmund sums up her 'little establishment' as comprised of 'Lord Macartney', that is, the journal of his embassy to China, Crabbe's *Tales* and *The Idler* (MP, 156). Texts from the wider library of Fanny's reading still impress themselves on the attentive reader, however, through their influence on Fanny's thought processes. The manifestations of this influence in the text range from outright quotation to more subtle cues; responses to a literary past that, through free indirect discourse, move between Fanny's consciousness and the narrative itself.

On hearing Mr Rushworth's plans for fashionable deforestation at Sotherton, Fanny murmurs to Edmund, 'Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper? "Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited"' (MP, 56).<sup>16</sup> When Fanny visits Sotherton's chapel, another of her literary preoccupations comes to the fore. Here, her imaginative engagement with her reading is shown not merely to include quotation, but also to extend beyond it, in a way that colours her perception:

Fanny's imagination had prepared her for something grander than a mere, spacious, oblong room, fitted up for the purpose of devotion – with nothing more striking or more solemn than the profusion of mahogany, and the crimson velvet cushions appearing over the ledge of the family gallery above. 'I am disappointed,' said she, in a low voice, to Edmund. 'This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners. No banners, cousin, to be "blown by the night wind of Heaven." No signs that a "Scottish monarch sleeps below."'

'You forget, Fanny, how lately all this has been built, and for how confined a purpose, compared with the old chapels of castles and monasteries. It was only for the private use of the family. They have been buried, I suppose, in the parish church. *There* you must look for the banners and the achievements.'

'It was foolish of me not to think of all that, but I am disappointed.'  
(*MP*, 85–6)<sup>17</sup>

In this scene, Edmund functions, as is his wont, as Fanny's tutor, reining in her Scott-inspired dreams of medieval pageantry with his more accurately historicised presentation of facts. Although Fanny defers to the truth of his corrective statement, she nevertheless reserves her right to retain her original, somewhat quixotic sentiment, and to continue in her disappointment at the chapel's depressingly modern décor. Other moments in the novel, however, suggest to the reader that Fanny has only paid lip-service to Edmund's attempt at enforcing sound Enlightenment realism on her perceptions. Fanny has moved beyond the limitations of his tutelage to embrace romanticism. When Mary Crawford complains that there is 'something in the sound of Mr. *Edmund* Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it', Fanny responds,

'How differently we feel! ... To me, the sound of *Mr.* Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning – so entirely without warmth or character! – It just stands for a gentleman, and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown – of kings, princes, and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections.'  
(*MP*, 211)

Here Fanny rejects the orthodox interpretation of names that operated as a social and linguistic code to describe family status throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which Austen herself observes scrupulously. Mary's is, of course, the correct reading of the conversational practice by which Mr Edmund Bertram becomes Mr Bertram in the sustained absence of his elder brother. Her comment also emphasises her discontent with Edmund's inferior social position, and may hint at what Fanny will later suggest is Mary's wish for the death of Tom Bertram, the elder son. Fanny's apostrophe, however, points at an undercurrent of literary tradition that seems to surface in several parts of the novel, and her appeal to 'kings, princes, and knights' and 'the spirit of chivalry' recalls her earlier disappointment at Sotherton chapel's dearth of medieval trimmings.

What is the reader to make of Fanny and her obvious attractions to a 'spirit of chivalry'? First of all, there is a striking contrast between the 'little establishment' of books in the East Room that earns Edmund's praise, and the literature that occasionally erupts into Fanny's consciousness. The reader cannot help but conclude from Fanny's quotations alone that Crabbe, Johnson and Lord Macartney are not the only 'books which charmed her leisure hours' (*MP*, 22). The books Fanny has in her 'establishment' seem to belong with the ugly footstool and other unwanted furniture of the East Room, books that are too old, unfashionable, moralistic or dull

to be wanted downstairs by the Bertram family, and cheap enough for Fanny to purchase with an occasional 'shilling' (*MP*, 151). The sketch of William's ship, the plants, and the transparencies of Tintern Abbey, the Italian cave and moonlit Cumberland lake which are Fanny's own attempts to decorate the old school room, suggest that her preferred reading might be similarly skewed towards the personal and the Romantic.

The text's repeated, if muted, references to Fanny's love of Scott and the trappings of medieval chivalry suggest a deeper involvement with the modern literature of a legendary past. A preoccupation with medievalism can be seen in the castles and Catholicism of much gothic literature – Smith certainly participates in this convention, as does Scott. The Romantic revival of interest in the Arthurian legend specifically (the so-called Matter of Britain) coincided with Austen's writing career, and can be seen in now little-known texts such as John Thelwall's 1801 play *The Fairy of the Lake*, Thomas Love Peacock's 1817 *The Round Table; or King Arthur's Feast* and Robert Southey's *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of King Arthur*, an edition of Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* that the poet laureate published in 1817.<sup>18</sup>

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries references to King Arthur 'appeared only in the lower worlds of popular culture and political propaganda', most notably in Henry Fielding's tales of Tom Thumb. As Stephen Knight and Rob Gossedge write, however, 'the idea of a monarch both historical and mythical was never entirely forgotten'.<sup>19</sup> The Romantics' anti-quarian impulses led to the rediscovery and reprinting of many medieval texts. An edited version of the Middle English poem *Arthur* (1425) appears in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1788, and George Ellis's 1805 *Specimens of the Early English Romances* quotes the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (1460).<sup>20</sup> Antiquarian literary scholars like Edward Jones – who published translations of Welsh Arthurian manuscripts – attempted to 'come at the truth' of the legends, now 'so enveloped by the romancers'.<sup>21</sup>

Walter Scott and Southey were separately planning editions of Malory's text in 1809, and in 1816 two rival publishers produced versions of the medieval romance – both cheap, and one unexpurgated.<sup>22</sup> In the century before the reprinting of Malory's epic, the Arthurian legends – like those of Robin Hood, Dick Whittington, Sleeping Beauty and the rest – survived in popular culture not only through 'literature', but also in the chapbooks that were the cheaply printed reading of the poor and children. St Clair quotes Henry Parrot's 1615 epigram on a typical rural reader:

Next after him your Country-Farmer

...

Shewe mee King Arthur, Bevis, or Syr Guye

These are the Books he onely loves to buye.<sup>23</sup>

Chapbooks (along with the more scholarly versions presented in histories) are the most likely source for Austen's early encounters with the chivalric tradition, but these texts of children and the working classes seem not to have made it into the more select library of *Mansfield Park*. Unlike her creator, Fanny's knowledge of 'heroism and renown – of kings, princes, and knights' can be traced to much more recent, specifically Romantic sources, and Scott in particular.

Along with her specific references to knights, banners and chivalry, Fanny's interest in the Arthurian legend can be observed seeping into other areas of the text, colouring not only her impression of novelistic events, but also the reader's. Allusions to Scott's Arthurian-themed *Marmion, A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808) and *The Bridal of Triermain* (1813) appear throughout *Mansfield Park*. In the latter poem Scott's apparently modern-day hero, Arthur, styles himself as a 'tutor' to the heroine Lucy, and holds her interest with a ballad concerning his legendary namesake. The poem centres on King Arthur's adultery with the enchanting, half-human Guendolen, and the consequences of their affair. The theme of marital infidelity courses through the poem, and while Scott's depiction of a woman's barely suppressed lust is couched in coy, mock-chivalric language, it resonates in Maria Bertram's behaviour towards Henry Crawford:

The Lady sate the Monarch by,  
Now in her turn abash'd and shy,  
...  
Yet shadows of constraint were there,  
That show'd an over-cautious care  
    Some inward thought to hide.  
And so the wily Monarch guess'd  
That this assumed restraint express'd  
More ardent passions in the breast  
    Than ventured to the eye.  
Closer he press'd  
...  
But why pursue the common tale?  
Or wherefore show how knights prevail  
    When ladies dare to hear?<sup>24</sup>

In *Marmion* the depiction of flirtatious harp-playing echoes in Mary Crawford's performances for both Edmund and the jealous Fanny:

The Queen sits lone in Lithgow pile,  
    And weeps the weary day  
The war against her native soil,  
Her monarch's risk in battle broil: –

And in gay Holy-Rood, the while,  
 Dame Heron rises with a smile  
     Upon the harp to play.  
 Fair was her rounded arm, as o'er  
 The strings her fingers flew;  
 And as she touch'd and tuned them all,  
 Ever her bosom's rise and fall  
     Was plainer given to view;  
 ...  
 The Monarch o'er the siren hung  
 And beat the measure as she sung;  
 And, pressing closer, and more near,  
 He whisper'd praises in her ear.<sup>25</sup>

Fanny's medievalist daydreaming is, the text suggests, likely provoked by her remembrances of Scott. Scott's presence here, however, and the medievalist revival in which Scott was a leader, force us to reconsider the novel with a mindfulness of the growing early nineteenth-century interest in medieval literature, and Arthurian legends in particular.

At first glance *Mansfield Park* seems to begin with the dispassionate indifference of the third-person, past-tense narrator, rattling off the history of 'thirty years ago' with an air of mere factual reportage (*MP*, 3). The opening, of course, eventually places Fanny squarely in the centre of the narrative, the place which novel-readers expect will be accorded the heroine. Yet, the course of the novel quickly and thoroughly demonstrates that Fanny's experience is only of any significance to herself: it is not until well into the novel's second volume that Fanny occupies any of the other characters' thoughts for any length of time. Given Fanny's lack of importance to anyone but the reader throughout the novel's first volume, the way in which the opening chapter sets out her parentage, her foster-parentage, and the relationships between aunts, uncles and cousins, seems to be oddly centred on Fanny. Odd it would be, except that the narrator is far from dispassionate, and is rather intensely interested in Fanny's history, and Fanny's point of view. Austen's technique here reflects the teleological plots of legend and orally transmitted epic, where constant repetition ensures that the story's end, and even its telling, is well known to all its hearers. Only the characters can still be surprised. Like the reader, but unlike the characters of *Mansfield Park*, the narrator is well aware of Fanny's future importance.

The novel begins with the marriages of three sisters, the Misses Ward of Huntingdon, and their divergent destinies:

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram,

of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady ... All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match ... She had two sisters to be benefited by her elevation ... Miss Ward ... found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris ... But Miss Frances married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family. (*MP*, 3)

The novel is concerned, however, less with these relationships than with the generation of Bertrams and Prices they produce. Austen deliberately begins not *in medias res*, as she had done so memorably in *Pride and Prejudice*, but even before the beginning of the novel proper, 'about thirty years ago'. This narrative choice both echoes the genealogical role of legends and enforces the primary importance of family to the novel, by beginning not with Fanny's birth or her first coming to live at Mansfield Park but with the Misses Ward of Huntingdon whose sibling relationship connects the families of Bertram, Norris and Price. Just as the future ménage of Mansfield Park will in some ways mimic that of the legendary King Lear (with Maria and Julia in the roles of the treacherous daughters Regan and Goneril, and Fanny as the vindicated Cordelia), the back-story of the Ward sisters recalls an even older legend.

Many versions of the Arthurian legend contain some reference to the circumstances of his birth, and some of these would likely have been available to Austen.<sup>26</sup> Malory's *Morte Darthur* begins with the meeting of Arthur's father, King Uther Pendragon, and his mother Igraine, then Duchess of Cornwall. Once Uther has 'gat' his son, and had the Duke of Cornwall killed, he organises a triple wedding, for himself and his bride's daughters by her first husband. Malory writes:

Kynge Lott of Lowthean and of Orkenay thenne wedded Margawse that was Gawayns moder. And kynge Nentres of the land of Garlot wedded Elayne. Al this was done at the request of kynge Uther. And the thyrd syster morgan le fey was put to scole in a nonnery. And ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete Clerke of Nygromancye. And after she was wedded to kynge Uryens.<sup>27</sup>

As this passage suggests, the subject of the tale is not the marriages themselves, but their issue – Margause is distinguished as 'Gawaine's mother', and Gawaine and his brothers will become some of Arthur's greatest champions. Elaine effectively concludes her involvement with the narrative at this point, while it is Morgan le Fay's necromancy, rather than her later marriage, that will cause problems for Arthur and his knights in the story's forthcoming chapters.

The legendary histories of the three daughters of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall have echoes in those of the three Misses Ward of Huntingdon in

the eighteenth century. Frances Ward, Fanny's mother, marries 'a Lieutenant of Marines' (MP, 3), who, like King Lot in the Arthurian legend, fails to assimilate into his wife's family and remains an impoverished and fecund liability to his genteel relations throughout the narrative. Lot's kingdom at the extreme north of the British Isles (Orkney) is changed, in Austen's England, for the extreme south – the naval base of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight: '*the Island*', as the young Fanny calls it (MP, 18, Austen's emphasis). The children of Lot and Margause play a significant role in the legend. In some stories their son Gareth runs away to Camelot where he finds work, not as a knight as befits his familial relationship to the king, but as a kitchenhand. Although he is eventually able to demonstrate his martial prowess and is knighted, he is first mortified by his position: his simultaneous belonging and lack of belonging to either kitchen or court. Like Fanny, Gareth must prove his worth before his true identity and value can be recognised by his family.

It is the three sisters of the legend, however, that seem to stick in Fanny's – or Austen's – imagination. The Elaine who becomes the wife of King Nentres has little reappearance or impact on the narrative after Malory's first mention of her, and like Lady Bertram might be considered remarkable solely for being unremarkable. Morgan le Fay, however, far from melting into the background, continues to exert a mischievous and malevolent influence on Arthur and his knights, and becomes one of the most famous witches of British literature. Austen's commitment to realism does not allow the eldest Ward sister, Mrs Norris, to be quite so potently pagan as Malory's necromancer Morgan le Fay. Mrs Norris is, however, demonstratively as malevolent as any fairy-tale witch, or evil stepmother. At one point Austen even has Mrs Norris practise a very minor, socially acceptable form of eighteenth-century witchcraft on the Sotherton gardener: 'she had set him right as to his grandson's illness, convinced him it was an ague, and promised him a charm for it; and he, in return, had shewn her all his choicest nursery of plants, and actually presented her with a very curious specimen of heath' (MP, 104). The 'charm' that Mrs Norris promises may be understood as what the *OED* defines as 'anything worn about the person to avert evil or ensure prosperity; an amulet'. It seems equally likely that the word's original meaning is intended: 'The chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess magic power or occult influence; incantation, enchantment; hence, any action, process, verse, sentence, word, or material thing, credited with such properties; a magic spell; a talisman, etc.' This oblique association of Mrs Norris with minor witchcraft survives in the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling (1997–2007), in which a malicious cat named Mrs Norris stalks the halls of Hogwarts school.

By framing the story of the three sisters in this way, and by including the otherwise irrelevant reference to Sotherton's gardener, Austen identifies Fanny's cruel aunt with a legendary witch, allowing the reader to attribute

Mrs Norris's interfering nastiness to the inveterate villainy of practitioners of black magic. Throughout the novel Fanny is essentially embroiled in an ongoing struggle with her aunt, one that ends only when she takes Mrs Norris's place in the vicarage and at Mansfield itself. Fanny, however, is too much a child of her times – or at least too polite – to suspect her aunt of the kind of deliberate mischievousness the narrator delights in insinuating.

Fanny's second-hand pleasure in the 'spirit of chivalry', and her creator's interest in the Arthurian legend belong, as I have suggested, to the first wave of its early Romantic revival. Austen's use of medievalism, however, seems not to rest on Smith's gothic romancing or Scott's antiquarian study of rare books, but rather on the orally transmitted legends which projects like James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems and Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* were busy in collecting, transcribing and translating. This is where the presentation of the Ward sisters' marriages and Arthurian legend intersect. Family history is, for the most part, oral history, and comprised of the half-remembered tales and embroidered anecdotes that are attendant on the 'histories' of pre-literate or semi-literate cultures, such as that of early medieval Britain. Like oral family histories, orally communicated legends and fairy stories also survive within families and other close-knit groups. Austen herself is reputed to have told 'the most delightful stories, chiefly of Fairyland' to her nieces and nephews, but even this anecdote has come down to us as no more than a recollection in old age of a childhood treat.<sup>28</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

the family of a country gentleman and a few of his  
friends – a narrow field and unproductive of much variety!  
– Hannah More<sup>29</sup>

they all returned to the house together, there to lounge  
away the time as they could with sofas, and chit-chat, and  
Quarterly Reviews, till the return of the others, and the  
arrival of dinner.

(MP, 104)

Commenting on Mary Brunton's *Self Control* (1810), Austen seems to disapprove of a broad narrative geography. 'I declare I do not know,' Austen writes, 'whether [the heroine's] passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does' (L, 244).<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, critics have taken this comment by Austen, along with her caution to her novel-writing niece not to allow her narrative to follow her characters into Ireland (as 'you know nothing of the Manners there'), as

amounting to a ladylike manifesto on the permissible limits of novelistic geography (*L*, 280). Franco Moretti, for one, has argued that Austen's geography amounts to what he terms a 'pattern ... of exclusion', a 'small' England.<sup>31</sup> In Austen's novels, writes Raymond Williams, 'where only one class is seen, no classes are seen', so it follows that the effects of class warfare must also be invisible.<sup>32</sup> Williams and Moretti are among many critics who see Austen's novelistic kingdom as confined, with borders that shut out anything as disagreeable as poverty, slavery, war, famine, industry or empire. These are subjects for Blake, Wordsworth, Byron or Shelley: the great poets of a turbulent age – not the Hampshire spinster with her neatly sewn hems and her neatly turned sentences. There are things that simply do not belong in an Austen novel – and their absence defines her œuvre as much as does the presence of country houses and marriageable young women.

These geographic limitations, Moretti argues – as Williams did before him – are also limitations of subject matter and of form. Outside the boundaries of Austen's fiction, beyond the hedgerows and neat lawns, is a literary jungle of obsession and suffering, of ghosts and demons, of chaos, poverty, sex and war. The overwhelming, nightmarish majesty of the sublime, however, will never cross the threshold into Austen's reassuringly genteel shrubberies. Such monsters and monsterish passions – it seems – belong to Romantic poetry, not to the Romantic-era novel.

By drawing such arbitrary borders around novels of this period, and around Austen's novels in particular, critics create an imaginary Austenian domain that is far from commensurate with what her fiction actually attempts. Austen does not ignore the topics which draw the attention of Romantic poets and essayists. Instead she works such topics into fiction rather than, say, a lyrical ballad or polemic pamphlet. The political intent of professedly political literature is inescapable, and no one could accuse William Hazlitt or Percy Shelley of writing 'apolitical' poetry and prose. But because we are taught to read Austen's fiction as the literature of a 'small, homogenous' England, we frequently *misread* the politics in her novels.<sup>33</sup> The Romantic period was characterised by a proliferation of print, and the expansion of every kind of print culture. Writers contributed with poetry, cartoons, exhortative essays; but Austen responds to the events and ideological battles of her day with fiction, just as she responds to poetry with fiction, to fiction with fiction, and to literary criticism with fiction.<sup>34</sup> Austen's medium of choice may be the novel, but that choice never entails the exclusion of other genres from the ambit of her interest.

The range of Austen's literary interests, and the way in which she interweaves them into the text of her novels, is illustrated by a well-known episode in *Mansfield Park*. In the garden of Mr Rushworth's estate, Sotherton, Rushworth and his fiancée Maria Bertram are walking with Henry Crawford, when their passage is halted by a locked gate and a ha-ha. Mr Rushworth hurries off to get a key from one of his gardeners, and in his absence Maria

and Henry trade flirtatious banter laced with heavy innuendo, while Fanny Price looks on. 'You have a very smiling scene before you,' says Henry, looking out at Mr Rushworth's vast estate. Maria asks him:

'Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said.' As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate; he followed her. 'Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key!'

'And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr. Rushworth's authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited.'

'Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will. Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment you know – we shall not be out of sight.' ...

Fanny, feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it. 'You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram,' she cried, 'you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes – you will tear your gown – you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go.'

Her cousin was safe on the other side, while these words were spoken, and smiling with all the good-humour of success, she said, 'Thank you, my dear Fanny, but I and my gown are alive and well, and so good bye.' (MP, 99–100)

The starling Maria refers to is from Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). Being unable to free the bird from its cage, the traveller Yorick passes him to Lord A, who gives him in turn to Lord B 'and so on – half round the alphabet'.<sup>35</sup> Maria escapes this fate of many literary adulteresses, but Austen's use of the quotation seems primarily to foreshadow Crawford's eventual abandonment of Maria.

This scene foreshadows Maria's discontent with her fiancé and with marital chastity, a discontent that will end in adultery and divorce. It is clear that the passage is meant, in Maria's words, both literally and figuratively – even symbolically, which is a rare device for Austen. Among critics, Jane Stabler draws readers' attention to the 'important metaphoric significance' of the gate and the ha-ha in this scene.<sup>36</sup> Tony Tanner has called this 'one of the most important gestures in the book' and a 'perfect image', while Jill Heydt-Stevenson argues that in this chapter, Austen's 'narrative style [is] dependent on a transparently symbolic lexicon'.<sup>37</sup> For the most part, however, Austen eschews this kind of obvious symbolism in her novels. Symbolism is sometimes a blunt, unwieldy tool in fiction, and it is not a technique that easily

keeps company with Austen's habitual, sophisticated irony, or her carefully controlled appearance of realism.

It is because Austen is so sparing in her use of symbolism – and the symbolism in this scene is so clear that even the novel's characters notice it and discuss it – that this episode stands out. Jocelyn Harris has pointed out that the garden at Sotherton closely resembles gardens in Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison*, and that 'Austen's garden is surely as symbolic as Richardson's'.<sup>38</sup> Both Richardson's garden and the garden at Sotherton remind Harris of the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, and it is this connection, between *Mansfield Park* and Milton's epic poem, that best demonstrates the way in which Austen reworks other literary genres in her own fiction.

Austen flags her interest in *Paradise Lost* early on in *Mansfield Park*, where she has Henry Crawford – repeating a joke from *The Loiterer* – refer to marriage as 'Heaven's last best gift' (43, Austen's emphasis).<sup>39</sup> The scene at the garden gate in Sotherton recalls the second book of the epic where Satan, on his journey from Hell, stops at its Gates, which are guarded by Sin and Death. Like Maria Bertram, Satan is warned against disobeying 'authority' and crossing the threshold into Chaos; like Maria Bertram, Satan ignores the warning and passes through anyway. Confronting Death, Satan declares with a 'disdainful look':

'Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,  
That darest, though grim and terrible, advance  
Thy miscreated front athwart my way  
To yonder gates? through them I mean to pass,  
That be assured, without leave asked of thee.'<sup>40</sup>

Although this passage reprises Satan's insolent challenge to God's authority, and prefigures the disobedience and fall of Adam and Eve, it was widely disparaged in eighteenth-century scholarly criticism for being out of keeping with the rest of the epic.

Samuel Johnson's response to this passage is typical of eighteenth-century critics. He writes:

Milton's allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken ... This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem; and to this there was no temptation, but the author's opinion of its beauty.<sup>41</sup>

This particular criticism was shared by many of Johnson's predecessors and contemporaries, who saw in Satan's interview with Sin and Death at the Gates of Hell what Austen calls in *Mansfield Park* 'a good spot for

fault-finding' (MP, 90). Johnson's opinion reflects a typically eighteenth-century preoccupation with rational analysis and categorisation, which condemns the mixing up of 'real' characters with their 'allegorical' counterparts, and maintains that the intrusion of allegory and symbolism into an epic mars the gravitas of the genre.

The Romantics, however, viewed this scene in a very different light. In this respect exceptional amongst eighteenth-century critics, Burke admired the 'significant and expressive uncertainty' of Milton's description of Death as a fierce, shadowy, shapeless presence, and used it as an example of the sublime. Lucy Newlyn demonstrates that Wordsworth was also attracted by the image, as were Blake, Coleridge and Keats.<sup>42</sup> This shift in critical popularity, from the most devalued, to the most frequently reprised and reconsidered episode from *Paradise Lost*, seems to have influenced Austen's own thinking about Milton's epic, and the generic elasticity involved in her particular variety of literary allusion.

By recovering the status of this episode from *Paradise Lost* in the literary culture of Austen's day, we can see that Austen's use of the gates-of-hell scene in *Mansfield Park* is as much an allusion to critical trends in relation to Milton, as it is an allusion to Milton's work itself. It demonstrates Austen's keen and even sarcastic understanding of the concrete effects of major literary movements as the careful and dispassionate criticism of the Enlightenment gave way to the exuberance of Romanticism. It is also important to recognise that Austen resists aligning herself with either interpretation – she reworks a scene beloved by the Romantics, but with some deference to the Enlightenment she emphasises its symbolic, even allegorical nature; a quality which markedly distinguishes this episode at Sotherton from the rest of Austen's more determinedly realist novel.

What emerges from placing this scene from *Mansfield Park* in the context of Miltonic criticism of the period, is the importance of that criticism as part of a cultural apparatus through which *Paradise Lost* was mediated for Austen, and for her first readers. The scene also suggests that Austen is more than ready to engage with *Paradise Lost* critically – not just as part of an impeccably canonical, English literary heritage, but as just another text, to be read and evaluated and commented on, just as she read and commented on Smith's novels, or Scott's medievalist poetry. As she had done with these texts, Austen likewise writes her criticism of Milton into her fiction.

It is important that the reader pay close attention to Austen's literary allusions, if only because they rarely operate merely as allusions – that is, as educated, playful references that embed her novels in a rich literary history and culture. Of course, they do that too. These allusions, however, also amount to literary criticism. It is, indeed, *fictionalised* criticism, but it is otherwise no different from that practised by Johnson, or Hazlitt, or in *The Quarterly Reviews* that Fanny and the others browse while waiting to leave Sotherton at the end of their visit. Austen belonged to a critical age, and we

underestimate the extent to which she engaged with her own contemporary culture when we fail to recognise the finely tuned critical perspective with which she read. The parameters of Austen's so-called 'domestic' fiction are not hermetically sealed – they are, on the contrary, always subject to permeation by the larger forces of geopolitics or mythological epic. Or, rather, by refusing to draw such boundaries around her own thinking, Austen proves that these forces are already surrounding and infesting the placid counties of the 'central part of England' (NA, 200), and propelling the 'quick succession of busy nothings' that superficially make up her plots (MP, 104). For Austen, there is no subject, no idea, that is beyond the novel's scope. When we turn our gaze to her imaginative geography, we should see not a neat border of country lanes and hedgerows, but rather what Satan sees after passing through the Gates of Hell: 'a circuit, undetermin'd'.<sup>43</sup>

Taking Austen's critical approach into account, the information that Fanny Price has been 'stooping' in her aunt's garden to cut roses (MP, 72) should recall to the reader the episode in *Paradise Lost* when Satan first sees Eve. In the poem, Eve is shown in the midst of rose bushes, 'oft stooping to support | Each flower of slender stalk'.<sup>44</sup> Fanny's is not the delightful labour of Paradise, however, and her stooping in the hot sun under the direction of her unfeeling aunts gives her a headache.<sup>45</sup> The virtues and obligations that Milton marks out for women sit very uncomfortably on Fanny's shoulders. Conversely, whereas Milton repeatedly forewarns his readers of Eve's frailty and predisposition to sinful disobedience, Fanny is finally vindicated as the only member of the Mansfield Park household who is free from guilt: 'We have all been more or less to blame,' says Edmund, 'every one of us, excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout' (MP, 187). Austen casts Fanny in the role of Eve, but has her version of *Paradise Lost* play out very differently. Just as Milton's epic is presented as the history 'Of man's first disobedience',<sup>46</sup> we may think of *Mansfield Park* as the story of Fanny's first disobedience. *Paradise Lost*, of course, is about Satan's 'first disobedience' too. Although Fanny's name is twice coupled with the word 'angel' (had she 'the beauty of an angel,' predicts Mrs Norris, 'she will never be more to either than a sister'; 'You have some touches of the angel,' Henry Crawford tells her [MP, 7, 344]) it behoves the reader to remember Satan's angelic background. Fanny defies her uncle's authority by refusing to marry Henry Crawford: her disobedience, however, is in resisting temptation, rather than succumbing to it. It is the 'authority' which ultimately is revealed to be in the wrong.

In Austen's novel, Edmund takes on the role of Adam, but it is Edmund who falls for the seductive Mary Crawford, as susceptible to her charms as Eve is to the serpent. Austen again reverses the events of *Paradise Lost* when – rather than choosing to follow Eve into exile by participating in her sin, as Adam does – Fanny succeeds in turning Edmund away from Mary Crawford, and leading him back to the somewhat tattered Eden of

Mansfield Park. The decisions Austen makes in her reworking of *Paradise Lost* redress the most misogynistic aspects of Milton's epic. While the scene at the locked gate in Sotherton's garden demonstrates Austen's familiarity with an evolving critical view of *Paradise Lost*, Austen nevertheless persists in her own independent critical evaluation. Critics of the Enlightenment and the Romantic period lauded *Paradise Lost* as one of the finest achievements of literature – Johnson, for example, calls it 'a poem, which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second, among the productions of the human mind'.<sup>47</sup> Romantic poets and artists were indebted to the epic, and frequently alluded to it in their own work. Austen, however, reads *Paradise Lost* not as the pinnacle of the literary canon, but as she would read any other text, and finds it woefully biased against Eve. Her use of the poem in *Mansfield Park* is thus more than allusion, and more than influence. It is criticism, refashioned as fiction.

In this radical act, Austen not only demands of her readers a reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*, but also a new understanding of the role of the novel. For Austen, the novel is above all things a *flexible*, inclusive medium, without distinct generic borders. The genre of the novel, and even an individual novel itself, is shown to encompass not only the topics of epic poetry, but also competing critical views of such poetry. As it is, Austen's symbolic interpolation into her otherwise dedicatedly realist work is a masterpiece of multivalent allusion and fictionalised critical commentary.

\* \* \* \* \*

Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! said I – still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.

– Laurence Sterne<sup>48</sup>

For well I understand in the prime end  
Of nature her the inferior, in the mind  
And inward faculties, which most excel,  
In outward also her resembling less  
His image who made both

– John Milton<sup>49</sup>

'Stamp't with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun:  
They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge:  
Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent'

– William Blake<sup>50</sup>

Austen's critical interest in *Paradise Lost* takes on new significance when we consider the status of Milton's poem in the Romantic period. As a work of literature *Paradise Lost* was of obvious and enduring significance. Its role as a moral and religious text, however, cannot be overestimated. In Hannah More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, the entirety of the first chapter is devoted to the narrator's encomium on Milton's epic, and its representations of Eve in particular. More's *Cœlebs* reflects:

I have been sometimes surprised when in conversation I have been expressing my admiration of the character of Eve in her state of innocence, as drawn by our immortal poet, to hear objections started by those, from whom of all critics I should have least expected it – the ladies ... I early became enamoured of ... Milton's Eve. I never formed an idea of conjugal happiness, but my mind involuntarily adverted to the graces of that finished picture ... The domestic arrangements of such a woman as filled the capacious mind of the poet resemble, if I may say without profaneness those of Providence, whose underagent she is ... It gives an image of that tranquillity, smoothness, and quiet beauty, which is of the very essence of perfection in a wife.<sup>51</sup>

More's heroine Lucilla Stanley is as close to a Regency version of Milton's Eve as can be imagined. Austen, in contrast, takes pains to distinguish Fanny from the heroine of *Paradise Lost*. On Adam's inquiries to Raphael concerning his 'studious thoughts abstruse', Eve retires 'with lowliness majestic', a situation *Cœlebs* imagines will irritate female readers.<sup>52</sup> More makes her hero's anticipatory retort typically scolding: 'methinks I hear some sprightly lady, fresh from the Royal Institution, express her wonder why Eve should be banished by her husband from Raphael's fine lecture on astronomy' – but Austen has Edmund and Fanny share a love of stargazing:<sup>53</sup>

'When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.'

'I like to hear your enthusiasm, Fanny. It is a lovely night ... There's Arcturus looking very bright.'

'Yes, and the bear. I wish I could see Cassiopeia.'

'We must go out on the lawn for that. Should you be afraid?'

'Not in the least. It is a great while since we have had any star-gazing.'  
(*MP*, 113)

We might gather from this that Austen is either updating the character of Eve – conservatively demonstrating that even a knowledge of astronomy may be displayed with due feminine reverence and timidity – or else

launching a direct attack on Milton. Further clues in the text of *Mansfield Park* suggest that Austen's project is broader and more politically pressing than a simple modernising revision of a canonical text. Although critics now tend to associate Milton, and particularly *Paradise Lost*, with the revolutionary tendencies of the Romantic era (for example, Wordsworth's frequently cited 'London: 1802', beginning 'Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour'<sup>54</sup>), as More's *Cœlebs* clearly shows, during the same period the epic poet was being deployed in the most conservative of causes: teaching young women how to behave themselves.

More thus recreates *Paradise Lost* as yet another conduct book for young ladies. To paraphrase Raphael, a woman may 'retain | Unalterably firm his love entire | Whose progeny you are', but only conditionally, that is, 'If ye be found obedient'.<sup>55</sup> For More, however, even more than 'obedience' is demanded of young women – their obedience must be uniformly cheerful, even pleasing – they must be agreeable. More's *Cœlebs* calls this '*the positive duty of being agreeable at home*', and Lucilla's father concurs: 'the absolute morality of being agreeable and even entertaining in one's own family circle'.<sup>56</sup> Austen had earlier spoofed the necessity of being 'agreeable' above all else in her juvenile story 'Frederic and Elfrida', with a young lady named Charlotte 'whose character was a willingness to oblige every one'. When 'an aged gentleman with a sallow face & old pink Coat, partly by intention & partly thro' weakness was at the feet of the lovely Charlotte, declaring his attachment', the consequences are inevitable:

Charlotte, whose nature we have before intimated, was an earnest desire to oblige every one ... Not being able to resolve to make any one miserable, she consented to become his wife; where upon the Gentleman left the room & all was quiet.

Their quiet however continued but a short time, for on a second opening of the door a young & Handsome Gentleman ... entered ... the natural turn of her mind to make every one happy, [Charlotte] promised to become his Wife ... It was not till the next morning that Charlotte recollected the double engagement she had entered into; but when she did, the reflection of her past folly, operated so strongly on her mind, that she resolved to be guilty of a greater, & to that end threw herself into a deep stream. (*MW*, 4, 8–9)

Being perfectly agreeable, Austen jokes, can lead only to suicide. She leaves the test of perfect agreeableness to writers like More, but the more widely disputed issue of female obedience is still fodder for Austen's critical investigations.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen sets up two major tests of Fanny's obedience: the home theatricals and Henry Crawford's proposal. Both have numerous predecessors in Romantic-era fiction, a literary background Austen draws

on, and which would have been familiar to her first readers. Private theatricals were familiar holiday entertainment in the Austen household, and the dramatised spoof of *Sir Charles Grandison* was written with the participation of even very young Austen family members in mind.<sup>57</sup> Nothing as risqué as Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (1798, translated and adapted from August Von Kotzebue's 1780 *Das Kind der Liebe*) was ever attempted at Steventon, however, and it is clear that in *Mansfield Park* the nature of the play itself compounds the fault in putting it on. The most vexed issue was that of young ladies' participation in home theatre. More unquestionably disapproves of anything approaching 'display' – even her condemnation of acting is only obliquely mentioned as a metaphor for subtler offences. 'A woman,' she writes, 'whose whole education had been rehearsal, will always be dull, except she lives on the stage, constantly displaying what she has been sedulously acquiring.'<sup>58</sup> In Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814), the heroine Caroline Percy confirms her admirer's good opinion by refusing to participate in her cousins' home theatricals. 'It would have highly gratified and interested him to have seen Caroline act either the sublime or the tender heroine,' writes Edgeworth, 'but he preferred seeing her support her own character with modest dignity ... pleaded and pressed in vain; Caroline was steady in her refusal.'<sup>59</sup>

Germaine de Staël sees this as a peculiarly British reticence. In *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), the multitalented heroine acts the part of Juliet to great acclaim, but her Scottish lover is made thoroughly uneasy: 'he was enjoying the performance ... but he was also jealous ... not of any one particular man, but of the public who would be spectators of the talents of the woman he loved'. Staël continues, 'He would have liked to be the only one to know how witty and charming she was; he would have liked Corinne to be as shy and reserved as an Englishwoman and to reveal her eloquence and genius to him alone.'<sup>60</sup> This cultural dissonance – the painful stifling Corinne endures in England, and her lover's inability to reconcile her character with that demanded of respectable English womanhood – leads to the tragedy of the novel's conclusion. Not all private theatricals in literature, however, end with such despair.

In Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), the eponymous heroine, who for much of the novel is also anonymous, is bullied into acting alongside a number of bratty young ladies to whom she teaches music. In spite of her reluctance, her performance is triumphant and improves her standing among a society which can barely tolerate her namelessness and mysterious circumstances. The performance becomes a means of introducing Burney's heroine to her half-siblings, who remain unaware of their relationship, and of attracting the attention of the hero.

The inappropriateness of the home theatricals at Mansfield Park is not at issue in the text. Lady Bertram's somnolent approbation is obviously worth little in her husband's absence. Edmund makes it clear that

Sir Thomas, Mansfield's stern patriarch, would condemn their frivolities. Tom Bertram is unquestionably wrong in his determination to stage such a play in his father's absence, as his flimsy and self-serving attempts at justifying it prove. It is important to recognise that Austen could not have viewed all such entertainment as absolutely beyond the pale; rather, she presents it as being a transgression in the context of the Mansfield Park family. The reasons why this is so lie at the heart of Austen's political project in this novel.

*Mansfield Park* is, like More's *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* or Edgeworth's *Patronage*, a study of a family constructed along the conservative, patriarchal model approved by cultural arbiters like Burke.<sup>61</sup> Austen, like More, demonstrates the way in which such a family is in fact created by the influence of fiction and other literature on individuals. They show, as Nancy Armstrong argues, that fiction is at once the 'document and ... agency of cultural history'.<sup>62</sup> Where *Cælebs's* fantasy wife is explicitly drawn from Milton's Eve, Austen has Fanny inadvertently admit her identification of Edmund with the chivalric heroes of Scott's poetry. Other characters reveal views similarly drawn from literature. Sir Thomas's reprimand of Fanny, for example, runs into paraphrase of conservative commentators like Reverend James Fordyce:

'I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence.' (*MP*, 318)

Along with Austen's preoccupation with the literary influences that shape character is an attempt to play with the form that the idealised figures of literature might take when co-opted into a realist setting. Austen's experiment in *Mansfield Park* takes an ideal Burkean patriarchal family, with its strong father, docile mother, intact finances and handsome children, subjects it to the test of realism, and then observes and reports as the whole structure of the family collapses in on itself.

Before the climactic implosion, however, comes a second test, one that demonstrates even more clearly than the home theatricals the process of experimentation to which Austen subjects the Bertram family in *Mansfield Park*. Again, it is female, and particularly daughterly, obedience that is at issue. Milton states the case clearly for the conservative side:

'My author and disposer, what thou bid'st  
Unargued I obey; so God ordains,  
God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more  
Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.'<sup>63</sup>

It is when Fanny rejects Henry Crawford's marriage proposal, and persists in her rejection even once her uncle has added his recommendation to the suit, that the novel comes closest to revealing the traumatic impact of patriarchal power even on an 'agreeable' young lady like Fanny.

Conservative novelists of Austen's period tend to represent patriarchal power as wholly benevolent, and fathers act as a sort of domesticated personification of divine authority, placing great emphasis on their daughters' exercise of free will. Lucilla Stanley rejects marriage, when 'a girl of eighteen', to 'a young nobleman of a clear estate, and neither disagreeable in his person or manner, on the single avowed ground of his loose principles'. This 'noble rejection of the daughter,' More writes, 'was supported by the parents, whose principles no arguments drawn from rank or fortune could subvert or shake.'<sup>64</sup> The happy Percy family of *Patronage* enjoy the same understanding. On learning from her father of a gentleman's proposal, Caroline Percy

received from him and from her mother the kind assurance that they would leave her entirely at liberty to accept or refuse Mr. Barclay, according as her own judgment and feelings might dictate. They said, that though it might be, in point of fortune, a highly advantageous match, and though they saw nothing to which they could object in his character, understanding, and temper, yet they should not attempt to influence her in his favour. They begged her to decide entirely for herself, and to consult only her own happiness.<sup>65</sup>

Mr and Mrs Percy's calm disinterestedness is all the more surprising in light of the fact that they have recently lost their estate and the bulk of their fortune.

For the idealised families beloved of More and Edgeworth, a young woman's rejection of a marriage proposal – even of an acknowledged disinclination to a gentleman – receives the full and unalloyed support of her parents. In less conservative novels, beleaguered heroines are frequently exposed to the unwanted addresses of maniacally persistent suitors, and in Smith's *Celestina*, Brunton's *Self Control* and Burney's *The Wanderer*, heroines are pursued across country – and even across countries – by obsessed anti-heroes who refuse to take 'no' for an answer. *Celestina's* admirer follows her from Devonshire to the Isle of Skye (in disguise!), *Self Control's* Laura is pursued from Scotland to England before being kidnapped at the impassioned villain's behest and smuggled to Canada, and the heroine of *The Wanderer* is chased from revolutionary France to England by the *sans culottes* who has forced her, unconsenting, to marry him. In these texts heroines lack the support of a family: the lone, usually orphaned heroine is the central figure through which novelists of the Romantic period explore social injustice through suffering sensibility. In each of these three texts, the heroines are

(if only temporarily) socially and economically marginalised, and thus at the greatest risk from unwanted sexual overtures. Their extreme vulnerability, however, also acts as a kind of liberty, leaving them free from the familial pressure exerted on Clarissa Harlowe, and Fanny Price. Only Austen dares to revive the politically more troubling situation of Richardson's tragedy by positioning her besieged heroine within the circle of a powerful family, and Austen refuses Fanny the special circumstances with which Richardson attempts to ameliorate Clarissa's disobedience.

Henry Crawford is no hideous, miserly Solmes. On the contrary, he is as attractive and charming as Lovelace, and substantially less of an immoral rake.<sup>66</sup> Richardson has his heroine tormented by an extraordinarily cruel and grasping brother, who has usurped his father's proper authority, but Austen allows Fanny a true friend in Edmund, and an uncle who is genuinely and unselfishly concerned for his niece's prospects. Fanny still says 'no', however, and the text vindicates her choice. Austen's artistic choices in *Mansfield Park* demonstrate the extent to which – in this, her first novel written wholly in adulthood – she structured her text in order to criticise specific novelistic conventions. The 'crisis' of an unwanted proposal is, as we have seen, the humdrum focal point of many novels, and its treatment by the novelist is a straightforward indicator of that novel's political agenda. In *Mansfield Park*, however, Austen transforms the staple ingredients of the conservative novel – the grateful daughter, the benevolent patriarch, the submissive matron, the supportive and honourable brother – in the crucible of literary realism.

What the theatrical, 'unhappy mansion'<sup>67</sup> of *Mansfield Park* shows is that the conservative patriarchal ideal of family as it was conceived of by writers like Burke, Edgeworth and More is inescapably oppressive. Unlike these novelists, and unlike even expressly radical writers such as Smith or Robert Bage, Austen does not ascribe the systemic defects of domestic patriarchy to the shortcomings of individuals. In Bage's *Hermesprong*, for instance, the domestic tyrant Lord Grondale is a scheming, corrupt, priapic assembly of personal and political villainies whose behaviour towards his daughter Caroline is clearly modelled on that of the Harlowes to Clarissa. Sir Thomas Bertram, Baronet and MP, living up to even a Burkean standard of public and private virtue, and honestly attempting to act in his niece's best interests, nevertheless renders Fanny quite as miserable as *Hermesprong's* Caroline. In *Mansfield Park*, it is not the personal failings of the powerful, nor the ingratitude and vice of the weak, nor even sinister outside influences that cause the suffering of the innocent, but the traditional structure of the family – and by inference the state – itself.

What Austen stops short of doing in *Mansfield Park* is outlining any alternative system of human relationships, contenting herself instead with playing out the consequences of prevailing conservative ideologies. What she does make wickedly transparent, however, is the seductive cultural

apparatus that such ideologies make available to the powerless. Fanny has fully imbibed the conservative message that she must be agreeable, quiet, grateful, meek, self-denying: that is, she must be miserable to be good. As Austen points out, however, 'if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another ... we find comfort somewhere' (*MP*, 46). In the course of the novel Fanny learns that the 'mind is its own place, and in itself | Can make a heaven of hell'.<sup>68</sup> Her ultimate achievement is not in escaping Mansfield Park, but in coming to love it.<sup>69</sup> This leads to one of the most troubling and masochistic comments in Austen's writing, if not in all Romantic fiction: 'Fanny ... must have been happy in spite of every thing. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all that she felt or thought she felt, for the distress of those around her' (*MP*, 461). It is a strange psychology indeed, that finds its happiness in the misery of others, that is in fact *made* happy by misery, but this is Fanny's greatest achievement. Unlike the obliging Charlotte from 'Frederic and Elfrida', Fanny has learned how to be a good girl, and survive in the process. This is Austen's final criticism of the Burkean model of family, and the conservative ideal of femininity as conceived by More. In such a society, individuals can only call themselves happy by inverting the very concepts of 'happiness' and 'misery'.

# 5

## ‘Hints from Various Quarters’: *Emma* and the ‘Plan of a Novel’

‘I doubt it’s being very clever myself,’ said Mr. Weston. ‘It is too much a matter of fact, but here it is. – What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection?’

‘What two letters! – express perfection! I am sure I do not know.’

‘Ah! you will never guess. You, (to Emma), I am certain, will never guess. – I will tell you. – M. and A. – Em – ma. – Do you understand?’

Understanding and gratification came together.

(*E*, 371)

M<sup>rs</sup> Wroughton – did not like it so well as *P&P*. –

Thought the Authoress wrong, in such times as these, to draw such Clergymen as M<sup>r</sup> Collins & M<sup>r</sup> Elton.

Sir J. Langham – thought it much inferior to the others. –

M<sup>r</sup> Jeffery (of the Edinburgh Review) was kept up by it three nights.

Miss Murden – certainly inferior to all the others.

Capt. C. Austen wrote – ‘Emma arrived in time to a moment. I am delighted with her, more so I think than even with my favourite *Pride & Prejudice*, & have read it three times in the Passage.’

M<sup>rs</sup> D. Dundas – thought it very clever, but did not like it so well as either of the others.

‘Opinions of *Emma*’ (*MW*, 439)

‘The judicious reader will see at once’, writes Walter Scott in his review of *Emma*, that in defending the novel as a genre, ‘we have been pleading our own cause’: he confesses to a ‘more general acquaintance with this fascinating department of literature, than at first sight may seem consistent with the graver studies to which we are compelled by duty’. Scott’s

review belongs to an emerging trend in criticism of the novel in the first decades of the nineteenth century, one that began to value artistry equally with morality. Scott takes in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, but saves his lengthiest discussion for *Emma*, which he sees as the example *par excellence* of the 'class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel'.<sup>1</sup> The 'judicious reader' to whom Scott's review is addressed is a member of an unprecedentedly literate and *critically* literate class, thoroughly versed in the opinions of *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly*; 'l'homme moyen intellectuel, "the reader to whom everything did not always have to be explained"'.<sup>2</sup> As the 'Opinions of *Emma*' show, there remained plenty of conservative, moralistic, unskilful novel readers, whose responses to innovative fiction are as old-fashioned as they are tedious. By 1815, however, there was a growing phalanx of clever, curious, and 'judicious' readers, whose taste for more complex literary fare had been created by authors like Scott, Edgeworth and, as Scott makes clear in his review, Austen herself. Nowhere in Austen's writing is the 'judicious reader' – and judicious reading – more in demand than in *Emma*, her fourth novel, and the last to be published in her lifetime.

Scott's review, engineered by Austen's publisher John Murray, and *Emma*'s dedication to the Prince Regent, contrived by the Regent's librarian James Stanier Clarke, both affirm the height of critical acclaim that Austen had reached in the few short years since the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*. That Francis Jeffrey, formidable proprietor of *The Edinburgh Review* and Britain's most powerful critic, was, as Austen records, 'kept up by it three nights', suggests that *Emma*'s importance was quickly recognised by the new breed of professional literary critics.<sup>3</sup> Yet as the 41 statements collected by Austen in her 'Opinions of *Emma*' demonstrate, many of Austen's contemporaries did not agree with Scott's positive assessment of the novel's achievement. I noted in Chapter 2 that Scott's review of *Emma*, in its discussion of the development of probability and realism, and its praise of 'a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times', unintentionally paraphrases Samuel Johnson's famous essay on the novel in *The Rambler* No. 4. The coincidences of Scott's and Johnson's remarks on the novel demonstrate the extent to which the concerns of genre and realism dogged the novel throughout the eighteenth century, and were still at issue in the nineteenth century.

This chapter looks at Austen's artistic manipulation of generic and critical conventions in *Emma*, a text that can be read at once as meta-novelistic and as anti-novelistic. *Emma*'s multiplicity of subplots, and its preoccupation with the reading, rereading and misreading both of writing and of events internal to the text, render the novel a manifesto for Austen's approach to novelistic criticism, or, in other words, the 'judicious' reading which

Austen's fiction demands. *Emma* and its often overlooked companion-piece, the parodic 'Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters', define Austen as both a critic and a novelist.

\* \* \* \* \*

Story, story, story, is what they hunt after, whether sense or nonsense, probable or improbable.

– Samuel Richardson<sup>4</sup>

The 'Plan of a Novel' is undated, but it was certainly composed after the publication of *Emma* at Christmastime, 1815. I conjecture that Austen wrote the 'Plan' before reading Scott's review of *Emma*, which appeared in March 1816. The 'Plan' reflects her earliest response to, and frustrations with, *Emma*'s initial reception. If Emma Woodhouse, as Austen reportedly said, is a character 'whom no one but myself will much like', then the 'Plan' is a mocking concept of a novel that will please everyone, a spoof of contemporary taste.<sup>5</sup> It begins thus:

Scene to be in the Country, Heroine the Daughter of a Clergyman, one who after having lived much in the World had retired from it, & settled in a Curacy, with a very small fortune of his own. – He, the most excellent Man that can be imagined, perfect in Character, Temper & Manners – without the smallest drawback or peculiarity to prevent his being the most delightful companion to his Daughter from one year's end to the other. (MW, 428)

We soon learn that his daughter is also a 'faultless Character', that she is 'perfectly good, with much tenderness & sentiment, & not the least Wit'. The novel is to open with father and daughter conversing in 'long speeches, elegant Language – & a tone of high, serious sentiment' (MW, 428–9). The first volume then follows the father's account of his life and 'the many interesting situations' in which he has found himself, before the heroine is driven from her Edenic home 'by the vile arts', writes Austen, 'of some totally unprincipled & heart-less young Man, desperately in love with the Heroine, & pursuing her with unrelenting passion' (MW, 429).<sup>6</sup> Throughout the rest of this hectically peripatetic novel, the heroine is to be 'Often carried away by the anti-hero, but rescued either by her Father or the Hero', and 'no sooner settled in one Country of Europe than' she is 'necessitated to quit it & retire to another'. Ultimately she is compelled to flee as far as Kamchatka, the easternmost peninsula of Siberia, and endures 'at least 20 narrow escapes' before she is 'happily united' to the hero (MW, 429–30).

The 'Plan of a Novel' was substantially, as Austen suggests in its subtitle, 'composed from hints' from her dissatisfied readers. In the margins of the manuscript, Austen numbered each plot element, footnoting beneath the text the name of the reader who had made each suggestion.<sup>7</sup> From the parodic framework of this most un-Austenian novel it is possible to reconstruct the kinds of criticism of her work that Austen met with from her circle of family and friends – criticism Austen manifestly disdained. It is striking that the 'hints' universally accord with the most threadbare clichés of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sentimental fiction.<sup>8</sup> What the 'Plan of a Novel' makes clear is that Austen was demonstrably and deliberately writing against the established tastes of her conservative contemporaries.

It is Austen's novel-writing niece, Fanny Knight, who wants the heroine to be 'faultless ... very highly accomplished, understanding modern Languages & (generally speaking) everything that the most accomplished young Women learn'. Fanny also wants the hero to be, like Sir Charles Grandison, 'all perfection', and for the heroine to live throughout the novel in 'elegant Society' and 'high style' (Fanny refrains from suggesting exactly what might have passed for high style in early nineteenth-century Siberia). Austen's second cousin Mary Cooke demands a heroine with 'not the least Wit', 'dark eyes & plump cheeks', and generously offers a plot twist reminiscent of *Mansfield Park*: 'The heroine's friendship to be sought after by a young Woman in the same Neighbourhood, of Talents & Shrewdness, with light eyes & a fair skin, but having a considerable degree of Wit, Heroine shall shrink from the acquaintance.' In accord with Fanny Knight, Mary Cooke is emphatic that 'All the Good will be unexceptionable in every respect – and there will be no foibles or weaknesses but with the Wicked, who will be completely depraved & infamous, hardly a resemblance of Humanity left in them.' Mr Sherer, the vicar of Godmersham, displeased by Austen's irreverent treatment of clergymen in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, desires the heroine's father be 'the model of an exemplary Parish Priest' (MW, 428–30).

The most important – if unwitting – contributor to the 'Plan of a Novel' was the Reverend James Stanier Clarke, librarian to the Prince Regent, who had written to Austen with a subject for a novel with risible similarities to his own life's experiences. From Clarke, Austen derives her heroine's father's history:

his going to sea as Chaplain to a distinguished Naval Character about the Court, his going afterwards to Court himself, which introduced him to a great variety of Characters & involved him in many interesting situations, concluding with his opinion of the Benefits to result from Tythes being done away, & his having buried his own Mother (Heroine's lamented Grand-mother) in consequence of the High Priest of the Parish

in which she died, refusing to pay her Remains the respect due to them. The Father to be of a very literary turn, an Enthusiast in Literature, nobody's Enemy but his own.

All of this is taken almost verbatim from Clarke's officious letters to Austen in late 1815, which Brian Southam believes to be the 'occasion' for Austen's composition of the 'Plan' (MW, 429–30). Clarke's suggestions, of course, jar outrageously with the content and interests of Austen's novels, in which the sentimental scene of a clergyman's burying his own mother would only be slightly more out of place than a lengthy polemic on tithes.

For Austen's readers today, the interest of the 'Plan' lies in its comically perverted cataloguing of the opinions of Austen's social circle on the subject of what makes a good novel. Fanny Knight, Mary Cooke and Mr Sherer unite in their disapproval of what were commonly called 'mixed' characters – that is, characters that were neither perfectly good nor utterly evil – and an uneasiness towards depictions of authority figures (fathers, clergymen, Members of Parliament) compromised by unbecoming weaknesses and personal foibles. The 'Plan' also reveals a strong sense that the novel possesses essential genre elements that Austen ought to be including. It is no amateur, but William Gifford – editor of *The Quarterly Review*, Byron's poetry and Austen's novels – who is responsible for recommending the secluded countryside setting Austen chooses for the 'Plan', and it is a mark of Austen's unyielding artistic independence that she includes his name and suggestion on par with her Hampshire readers.

The responses of this Hampshire set as revealed in the 'Plan' and the 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* are useful to our understanding of Austen's critical project. The adherence of so many of her readers to the interminable clichés of the eighteenth-century novel must have been frustrating for Austen, whose own works insist on the right of the genre to break new ground. In the 'Plan', the suggestions of individuals are also joined by literary sources, and demonstrate in relatively simple fashion the way in which Austen developed her own fiction out of other novels' shortcomings. The opening of the 'Plan', for instance, with its heroine and her father keeping house in the countryside, is reminiscent of the first scenes from the juvenile 'Love and Freindship', and also those of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Smith's *Emmeline*, Burney's *Evelina*, Brunton's *Self Control* and Bage's *Hermsprong*, to name just its most obvious antecedents. It also bears remarkable similarities to the unassuming first chapter of *Emma*: a resemblance that (after consulting the 'Plan') readers can now discover Austen has carefully concealed beneath the surface of *Emma*'s quiet realism. The 'Plan' shows that Austen's first readership knew the elements they expect to meet with in a novel, and that they find fault with the absence or unconventional use of those elements in Austen's fiction. Reading *Emma*

in conjunction with the 'Plan' allows the 'judicious reader' to recognise the subtle ways in which Austen persistently manipulates readers' expectations of the novel, both to create her fiction and to pass judgment on the genre as a whole.

The 'Plan' also shows us a facet of Regency-era culture that blurs the margins between literature and reality. Clarke's suggestion that Austen 'delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and Enthusiasm of a Clergyman', for instance, is drawn ostensibly from his autobiography. In his proposal, however, Clarke mentions James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771, 1774), August Lafontaine's *Tableau de Famille* (1801) and Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (L, 309). The literary conservatism of the 'Plan' shows that the typical Regency-era reader understood the novel as existing principally in relation not to life, but to other novels. What Clarke's suggestions make clear is that this way of thinking about novels has seeped into his understanding of himself – a man 'Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature' – and he conceives of his own life as the plot of sentimental fiction, his personality as an amalgam of famous characters. His quotation, 'no man's Enemy but his own', from a description of Tom Jones, also links him to Fielding's enduringly popular clergyman Parson Adams from *Joseph Andrews* (L, 309).<sup>9</sup> Thus the 'heroine's father' – developed from Clarke's suggestion – is not merely a caricature of Clarke himself, but also a composite of the fictional creations of Fielding, Goldsmith and others. For Clarke, even a character 'drawn from life' (and his own life, at that) cannot be transformed into material for a novel without first conforming to the established generic conventions that exist for its presentation. It may even be that the historic James Stanier Clarke has come to view himself as belonging to this fictional tradition: it is certainly a role for which his letters fit him.

In contrast to Clarke's learned minister in the tradition of Parson Adams or Dr Syntax, Austen's dislikeable Mr Collins and Mr Elton appear as a prodigious affront to accepted novelistic practice.<sup>10</sup> Austen arguably does affront the dignity of the cloth by having her two most humiliating scenes of rejected marriage proposals star clergymen who are wholly unattractive – in Mr Collins's case, even repulsive – to her heroines. Balanced against her clergymen-heroes Henry Tilney, Edmund Bertram and Edward Ferrars, however, it is difficult to claim any kind of thoroughgoing anti-establishment tendencies on Austen's part. Robert Bage's Dr Blick is a different creature, 'a man perfectly orthodox in matters of church and state, such as these bad times require; and, thank heaven, we have plenty of them'.<sup>11</sup> Blick is a vicious enforcer of and apologist for the worst excesses and corruptions of the ruling class, and clearly meant as a criticism of the Church of England. In this light, the complaints levelled at Austen by the Reverend Mr Sherer or the pious Mrs Wroughton seem as inevitable as they are petty.

Along with her questionable clergymen, Austen's presentation of so-called 'mixed' characters put her at the transgressive forefront of her contemporary

novelists, and it clearly made many of her first readers uncomfortable. The 'mixed' character is at the heart of eighteenth-century moralistic discourse surrounding the novel. That the good be paragons of virtue, and the bad repellent embodiments of evil, was a rule laid down by the formidable Dr Johnson himself. In *The Rambler* No. 4, after praising the new, reality-imitating style of Samuel Richardson, Johnson outlined a serious moral duty for the novel, a duty alone through which its existence could be justified. This duty was, in Johnson's words, 'to increase prudence without impairing virtue'. 'It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character', he writes, 'that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn.' He criticises those writers who, 'for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages', because once a reader becomes interested in a character, they may come to regard even that character's vices 'with kindness, for being united with so much merit'.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that Johnson had in mind Richardson's rival Fielding, and Fielding's charming fictional scoundrel Tom Jones. Yet 65 years after Johnson's essay, his dictates were still acknowledged as truths among Austen's family and friends: in the minds of Austen's reading public, this doctrine of the novel was entrenched. Despite the substantial cultural barrier of her contemporaries' literary conservatism, Austen finds no artistic difficulty in revolting against Johnson's rules. While she refrains from hurling his dictionary out a carriage window, as Thackeray's Regency anti-heroine Becky Sharp will do, Austen's fiction insists on a new species of novel with morality that is not so clear and fixed, and a new style of ironic narration which renders even orthodox-sounding authoritative statements uneasily plastic and multiply interpretable.<sup>13</sup>

In Chapter 2 I emphasised the surprising continuities between Scott's review of *Emma* and Johnson's *Rambler* No. 4. It is important to recognise that many of these continuities arise from Scott's conscious attempt to respond to Johnson's dictates. As much as he follows the basic structure of Johnson's essay, and ultimately makes similar claims, Scott does attempt to discard many of Johnson's maxims from the fundamentals of novelistic criticism. Scott's review overturns many of the critical rules by which (he feels) novels have been constrained, and lays down a new set of principles for the form thereafter. Scott makes entertainment the chief purpose of the novel: its role is to alleviate 'a portion of human misery' attended by sickness, loneliness, anxiety and old age (this aligns him with Barbauld, who writes that 'the humble novel is always ready to enliven the gloom of solitude, to soothe the languor of debility and disease, to win the attention from pain or vexatious occurrences'<sup>14</sup>). As Johnson did before him, Scott claims to be overseeing a new epoch in the development of the novel, particularly in regard to what we now call realism.

The author of *Waverley* had, of course, every reason to believe himself witness to a new kind of fiction. It is striking, however, that Scott nevertheless

chooses Austen's novels – and *Emma* in particular – for the basis of arguably his most important essay on contemporary fiction. Scott clearly sees enough in Austen's novels to believe them a new achievement in the novel, one as important to his generation as Richardson's novels had been to the mid-eighteenth century. At a time when Scott had just launched his own spectacular career as a novelist, Austen's fiction provided the instigating force for his serious meditation on the state of the novel as art, rather than merely another aspect of the Romantic-era culture wars. What Scott's review does demonstrate is the way in which Austen, with *Emma*, moved to the forefront of an ongoing critical conversation that strove to articulate the novel's artistic parameters, along with its intellectual and political mandate for the nineteenth century.

That a novel might be read, unapologetically, for pleasure alone, was the most important development of novelistic criticism in the Romantic period. Of course, the idea that reading novels could, or even ought to, be pleasurable was not in dispute in the eighteenth century, although *why* this should be so was a question that attracted critical attention. That readers 'should choose to chill the bosom with imaginary fears, and dim the eyes with fictitious sorrow', writes Barbauld, 'seems a kind of paradox of the heart, and can only be credited because it is universally felt'.<sup>15</sup> Laura Runge argues that the 'prevailing understanding of literary pragmatism during the eighteenth century derives from the writings of Horace, who recommends instruction as well as pleasure – dulce et utile. These goals consequently become the universal criteria of legitimation for novel-writers.'<sup>16</sup> The concept that a novel's potential to give pleasure – that is, its artistic success as a form of entertainment – might outrank its value as a didactic device was, however, new. Barbauld writes in her preface to her collection of British Novelists:

If the end and object of this species of writing be asked, many no doubt will be ready to tell us that its object is, – to call in fancy to the aid of reason, to deceive the mind into embracing truth under the guise of fiction ... with such-like reasons equally grave and dignified. For my own part, I scruple not to confess that, when I take up a novel, my end and object is entertainment; and as I suspect that to be the case with most readers, I hesitate not to say that entertainment is their legitimate end and object. To read the productions of wit and genius is a very high pleasure to all persons of taste, and the avidity with which they are read by all such shows sufficiently that they are calculated to answer this end.

Barbauld, moreover, recommends fiction in language that associates reading novels with exemplary feminine behaviour. 'Reading is the cheapest of pleasures', she writes, 'it is a domestic pleasure'. It is her insistence on this

pleasure as solely justifying the production and consumption of novels, however, that is a truly radical advancement in novelistic criticism:

It is sufficient therefore as an end, that these writings add to the innocent pleasures of life; and if they do no harm, the entertainment they give is a sufficient good ... The unpardonable sin in a novel is dullness: however grave or wise it may be, if its author possesses no powers of amusing, he has no business to write novels; he should employ his pen in some more serious part of literature.<sup>17</sup>

Clifford Siskin comments on this development in the novel's reception, placing 'the "rise" of the novel ... in the supposedly lyrical period of Romanticism'. Siskin argues that 'what rose, however, was not just the number of individual novels, but novelism as well. By *novelism* I mean the habitual subordination of writing to the novel which made writing, by the end of a century initially obsessed with its dangers, comfortable.' 'Literature emerges', he continues, 'as something made ... *safe*.'<sup>18</sup> The impulse towards moral fiction did not vanish, either. Barbauld argues that 'it is not necessary to rest the credit of these works on amusement alone, since it is certain they have had a very strong effect in infusing principles and moral feelings'.<sup>19</sup>

Anxieties surrounding reading persisted, however, on both sides of the cultural and political divide. The radical Bage categorises reading as another effeminising feature of a corrupted, enervated civilisation, along with excessive alcohol consumption, long dinners and a lack of exercise. His gentleman-savage Hermsprong says:

'Reading is, as it were, a part of my existence. But, when with those people, [indigenous Americans, among whom he was raised] my hours of reading were theirs of evening sport. My pleasure was perhaps more exquisite; theirs more lively. They ended with a salutary weariness, which disposed them to sound repose; I, with head-ach perhaps, and with a yawning lassitude that disposed me to sleep, indeed, and also to dream.'

For Bage, the concept of reading-as-pleasure remains a troubled one. While Barbauld (like Scott and the few other contemporaries) had begun to allow that novels could be judged almost wholly on aesthetic rather than moral grounds, Bage continues to insist on a readerly role that is more complex than the old binary of wholesome pleasure/insidious dissolution. His hero asks,

'But in reality, is reading all pleasure? or is it pleasure to all? Are there not amongst you, who read because they have nothing else to do? to pass, without absolute inaction, those hours which must be endured,

before the wonted hours of pleasure arrive? Or, is reading all profit? Is knowledge the sure result? Your contradictory disputations, eternal as it should seem, in politics, in religion, nay even in philosophy, are they not calculated rather to confound than enlighten the understanding? Your infinite variety, does it not tend to render you superficial? And was it not justly said by your late great moralist, every man now has a mouthful of learning, but nobody a bellyful? In variety of knowledge, the aborigines of America are much your inferiors. What they do know, perhaps they know better.<sup>20</sup>

Austen, who had early declared herself of a family that 'are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so', seems almost to have begun her reading life further advanced along this theoretical route than critics such as Barbauld and Scott (*L*, 27). Like Bage, she disputes the idea that reading must be all pleasure or profit. As the polemic in the fifth chapter of *Northanger Abbey* famously declares, she is not one to 'adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding' (*NA*, 37). This is not an exhortation, however, to read indiscriminately or uncritically.

Austen's entire literary project, in fact, is underpinned by the assumption that the novel is no less worthy of reading than any other genre, and that it deserves its readers' equally critical attention. This is to be distinguished from writers like Edgeworth, who attempt to carve out a separate genre of serious (that is, masculine) novels. Little Isabella, of Edgeworth's *The Good Governess*, assumes that 'none but trifling, silly people were novel-readers', to which her governess responds, 'readers of trifling, silly novels, perhaps you mean'. She continues, 'it would be advantageous to invent some new name for philosophical novels, so that they may no longer be contraband goods – that they may not be confounded with the trifling, silly productions for which you have so just disdain'.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps better than any other contemporary critic, Germaine de Staël articulates the kind of potential that Austen saw in the genre. Her emphasis on the faculty of imagination is particularly salient to a reading of *Emma*:

And yet the advantage of fictions is not the pleasure they bring. If fictions please nothing but the eye, they do nothing but amuse; but if they touch our hearts, they can have a great influence on all our moral ideas. This talent may be the most powerful way there is of controlling behaviour and enlightening the mind. Man has only two distinct faculties: reason and imagination. All the others, even feeling, are simply results or combinations of these two. The realm of fiction, like that of imagination, is therefore vast.

Staël goes on to argue that 'the most useful kind of fiction will be novels taking life as it is, with delicacy, eloquence, depth and morality ... I think only the modern novel is capable of achieving the constant, accurate usefulness we can get from the picture of our ordinary, habitual feelings.' Staël's confidence in the novel, a medium in which, she writes, 'perfection may require the greatest genius', like Barbauld's, offered corroboration to Austen's long-held beliefs in the potential of the genre.<sup>22</sup> Novels were beginning to approach a level of excellence heretofore unprecedented and, moreover, were finally meeting with readers capable of appreciating their achievement.<sup>23</sup>

What Austen sets out to produce, then, in this newly supportive critical environment, is the kind of fiction that encourages and even demands such heightened attention from its readers, and nowhere is this more apparent than in *Emma*. William Galperin argues that the indeterminacy of the epistolary narrative offered a kind of interpretative liberty to readers that the authority of Austen's free indirect discourse eliminates, reassigning the work of construing the meaning of a text from the novel's reader to its author. *Emma*, he argues, as it works to reverse this process, can be read as 'an attempt to make the formal constitution of the novel, from which there is clearly no turning back, answerable to a legacy that allowed for – or, better still, mandated – a *competency* in the act of reading that narrative authority effectively usurps'.<sup>24</sup> I tend to disagree with Galperin's assumption that readers of epistolary novels could and did exercise a large degree of interpretative freedom. Richardson's resistant, Lovelace-loving readers – whose tendencies the author did his best to combat in various revisions, critical commentary and other paratextual declarations – were the exception rather than the rule. Most epistolary novels of the eighteenth century simply failed to exploit the now obvious potential of letters to create richly interlaced, epistemologically challenging novels made up of unreliable, or even manipulative and intentionally deceptive, first-person narratives. Austen goes some way towards achieving this in *Lady Susan*, with its two-faced eponymous heroine, but abandoned the epistolary method for an ironic free indirect discourse which ultimately proved infinitely more successful in creating the kinds of fiction her ambition sought: novels which have puzzled and delighted readers for two centuries.<sup>25</sup>

Central to Austen's project, as her collected 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* suggest, is a reader with critical skills sufficiently advanced to appreciate the complexities of her writing. This resonates with Tillotama Rajan's concept of the romantic reader as 'supplement', one who must 'bridge the gap between conception and execution, and to supply a unity not present in the text'.<sup>26</sup> Austen is not alone among Romantic-era writers in her desire to locate, or even create, this special readership – a readership somewhat intellectually above 'the Public'. What Lucy Newlyn calls the 'anxiety of reception' was, as she shows, a common factor in

Romantic literature.<sup>27</sup> It is important to recognise the *critical* advance that Austen's refusal to write down to the 'dull elves' represents. In the Johnsonian critical matrix, where inculcating morality – particularly to women, the young and the lower class, who should avoid thinking for themselves in any case – is the only respectable purpose of fiction, the kinds of sophisticated ethical and aesthetic demands Austen places on her readers are irrelevant. It is only once such unapologetic claims as Barbauld's, that the novel's 'end and object is entertainment' began to be made, that any kind of positive reception of works as challenging as Austen's could occur.

*Emma* works on several levels to both dramatise the entwined roles of reader and novelist, and also to train its readers in the act of reading. It is necessary to attend to the novel's many instances of reading, rereading and misreading to understand the ways in which Austen sets out to teach her readers how to read.

\* \* \* \* \*

'An old story, probably – a common case – and no more than has happened to hundreds of my sex before; and yet it may not be the more excusable in one who sets up as I do for Understanding.'

(*E*, 427)

Man's most valuable faculty is his imagination.

– Germaine de Staël<sup>28</sup>

'It must be all conjecture.'

'Conjecture – aye, sometimes one conjectures right, and sometimes one conjectures wrong.'

(*E*, 242)

*Emma* is unique in Austen's adult œuvre in its obsession, not only with other texts, but with the unspecific, stock elements of the eighteenth-century and Romantic-era novel. The source of this obsession is Emma Woodhouse herself, whose irrepressible quixotry takes on unprecedented dimensions, as she confidently manipulates everything she sees, hears and conjectures to conform with the much-overused plots of the novel of sensibility.<sup>29</sup> In earlier novels, quixotry like Emma's tends to be depicted far more harshly, with the heroine roundly punished for her wrong-headedness. Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and even Barrett's 1813 novel *The Heroine* are cases in point. Such misguided thinking was believed to be a particular danger for young women, because of the nature of the reading which made up their education and leisure. Austen's contemporary Elizabeth Hamilton

writes that in 'female education, as it is generally conducted, the imagination is stimulated, while the stock of ideas is yet too scanty to afford a supply of wholesome materials for its operations'. The outcome of this, argues Hamilton, is inevitable:

From the pains taken to direct the thoughts of young women to matrimony, it is not surprising that the idea of matrimony should, in some instances, engross their whole attention ... What a waste of the intellectual faculties do such instances exhibit! ... From circumstances apparently trivial, a word casually uttered, an object accidentally presented to view, a lively imagination will rapidly, from association, create a picture, whose origin it may perhaps be impossible to trace.<sup>30</sup>

Much of Hamilton's argument seems to stem from anxieties over women's independent thought. As Patricia Meyer Spacks writes, part of the original mistrust of novels arose from the fact that 'the possibility of feeling or thinking without witnesses readily evoked danger. Especially when commentators imagined young people or women reading alone, reading in privacy, they often imagined dark contingencies: uncontrolled, uncontrollable fantasies leading inevitably to disaster.'<sup>31</sup> While Austen's approach to this contemporary anxiety lacks any such sinister tone, it is no less serious for being comic. Austen extends her examination of the act of reading beyond a narrow-minded reaction to the reading performed by women and other oppressed groups. Her field, in *Emma*, is the act of reading (and the related acts of criticism and creativity) in the most abstract sense: an examination of the way that interpretation, judgment and imagination operate together to produce thought. So she makes her heroine into a self-styled 'Imaginist', a title she has invented, and one that (unlike those of linguist, grammarian and mathematician, to which theorists Emma compares herself) does not belong to any recognised discipline (*E*, 335). An imaginist, it turns out, is a very good name for a resistant reader – one whose mind wanders among possibilities not chosen by an author – or for a novelist who is yet to put pen to paper.

Emma, of course, is a pretty terrible novelist, and much of the novel's comedy arises from the contrast between her fictionally inflected expectations, and the novel's more advanced realism. The two major plots with which Emma simultaneously excites her imagination and blinkers her judgment star two young single women of Emma's acquaintance as their heroines. Emma has, ironically, removed herself from the lists of heroines with her decision not to marry. At its most basic, *Emma's* plot simply follows the lengthy process by which Emma finally recognises her role as heroine in the novel that bears her name. This is the kind of authorial teasing participated in by Harriet Byron's uncle in *Sir Charles Grandison*, after Harriet,

just as 'handsome, clever, and rich' as Emma, has refused numerous suitors without demur (*E*, 5):

'E'en do what you will, Harriet, you'll never be in fault. I could almost wish – But I won't tell you what I wish neither. But something must betide you, that you little think of; depend upon that. All your days cannot be halcyon ones. I would give a thousand pounds with all my soul, to see you heartily in love: Ay, up to the very ears, and unable to help yourself! You are not *thirty* yet, child.'<sup>32</sup>

Mr Knightley echoes this sentiment, doubling its obvious dramatic irony, in his conversation with Mrs Weston:

'There is an anxiety, a curiosity in what one feels for Emma. I wonder what will become of her! ... It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object. I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good.' (*E*, 40–1)

Mr Knightley's concerns stem from his disapproval of Emma's relationship with Harriet Smith. Harriet makes an ideal object for Emma's imaginism solely on account of her illegitimacy. Emma, naturally, turns this into the birth-mystery plot beloved of sentimental novelists. She begins their friendship with 'an endeavour to find out who were the parents', which is frustrated by Harriet's total ignorance. 'Emma was obliged to fancy what she liked' – writes Austen, surely a more pleasurable situation for an imaginist than the knowledge of actual facts – 'but she could never believe that in the same situation *she* should not have discovered the truth' (*E*, 27).

Harriet, encouraged by Emma, begins to act more like the hero or even anti-hero of a sentimental novel than its heroine, jilting Robert Martin and pursuing first Mr Elton and then Mr Knightley on the slightest evidence of their interest. Her collection of '*Most precious treasures*' – the detritus of Mr Elton's occasional visits, which Harriet retains long after his marriage – is taken from Charlotte Smith's *Celestina*, where Montague Thorold, mourning his beloved's absence,

fed his unhappy love by collecting many little memorials of her, which he preserved as sacred relics with all the fond idolatry of romantic passion. A cambric handkerchief which she had dropped, marked by her own hands and her own hair, was one of the principal of these, and in it he constantly kept folded up the sonnet, written with a pencil, which he had steeped in milk to preserve the letters from being creased.<sup>33</sup>

Harriet's collection, so banal as to be ridiculous, includes not a pencilled sonnet, but the useless end of a pencil itself, and an old bit of 'court plaister' (*E*, 338).

Jane Fairfax, as Kenneth Moler recognises, is the more 'obvious' candidate for 'heroineship'.<sup>34</sup> Emma's bias may arise, as a number of critics have argued (with varying degrees of hostility), from her own attraction to Harriet, whose 'beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired' (*E*, 23).<sup>35</sup> Being 'short, plump and fair, with a fine bloom', Harriet is physically a very different creature from the 'tall' figure of Jane Fairfax, verging on 'thin', with a complexion 'wanting colour' (*E*, 23, 167). Emma's antipathy towards Jane Fairfax is, as she recognises, 'so little just' as to be almost unaccountable, but Emma ultimately attributes her dislike to a combination of her jealousy and Jane's 'coldness and reserve', which, along with gravity and dignity, as we saw in Chapter 3, were characteristics recommended to young ladies by the conduct books, and often followed to a ludicrous extent by novelistic heroines (*E*, 167).

Conforming to the habits of 'love-lorn damsels', Jane also prefers 'solitary rambles', and her persistent, romantic ill health makes her far more conventional than Emma, who is 'the complete picture of grown-up health' (*E*, 39).<sup>36</sup> The first intimation of Jane's return to Highbury follows news that she is suffering a cold, information her aunt makes much of. In contrast, Emma's almost excessive healthiness may be read as a minor political and feminist statement by Austen, as feminine delicacy of constitution was reckoned more attractive than health or vigour. The conduct-book writer John Gregory advises young women to conceal health like Emma's:

though good health be one of the greatest blessings of life, never make a boast of it, but enjoy it in grateful silence. We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at a description in a way she is little aware of.<sup>37</sup>

Jane Fairfax's love for the married Mr Dixon, and her status as the heroine in a plot of tragic forbidden love, are encouraged in Emma's mind by her 'suspicious' reserve, and (as Emma explains to Frank Churchill) are confirmed by one salutary fact (*E*, 169). 'And then, he saved her life,' she explains to Frank, 'Did you ever hear of that? – A water-party; and by some accident she was falling overboard. He caught her.' 'He did', replies Frank,

'I was there – one of the party.'

'Were you really? – Well! – But you observed nothing of course, for it seems to be a new idea to you. – If I had been there, I think I should have made some discoveries.'

'I dare say you would; but I, simple I, saw nothing but the fact, that Miss Fairfax was nearly dashed from the vessel and that Mr. Dixon caught her.' (*E*, 217–18)

Emma is following a generic principle of sentimental fiction, as Elizabeth Inchbald makes clear in an 1807 article on novel writing:

When you are contriving that incident where your heroine is in danger of being drowned, burnt, or her neck broken by the breaking of an axle-tree – for without perils by fire, water, or coaches, your book would be incomplete – it might be advisable to suffer her to be rescued from impending death by the sagacity of a dog, a fox, a monkey, or a hawk; any one to whom she cannot give her hand in marriage; for whenever the deliverer is a fine young man, the catastrophe of your plot is foreseen, and suspense extinguished.<sup>38</sup>

It is not difficult to see why Emma, who filters her perceptions through a novelistic lens, might invent such a narrative for Jane Fairfax. Emma is irritated by Jane's presence in Highbury, the village over which, in Jane's absence, Emma 'reigns alone' (*E*, 71). She can only explain Jane's presence there by assuming that she is fleeing – heroically, desperately – from tragic, impossible love. 'I am sure there must be a particular cause for her chusing to come to Highbury instead of going with the Campbells to Ireland,' Emma tells Frank:

'Here, she must be leading a life of privation and penance; there it would have been all enjoyment. As to the pretence of trying her native air, I look upon that as a mere excuse. – In the summer it might have passed; but what can any body's native air do for them in the months of January, February, and March? Good fires and carriages would be much more to the purpose.' (*E*, 217)

The alliterative 'penance' shows how firmly Jane's guilt is fixed in Emma's mind. Heroines faced with impossible, or just imprudent, lovers, escape with propriety by removing themselves to remote locations. The eponymous heroine of *Celestina* travels to the Isle of Skye, Laura Montreville in *Self Control* escapes first Scotland, then the Canadian wilds, while Burney's Cecilia and the incognito heroine of *The Wanderer* go to great lengths to put distance between themselves and their adoring, obsessive paramours. Jane, as Emma could not predict, has made the contrary decision, and returned to Highbury in order to continue her illicit, secret relationship with Frank Churchill. This is by no means an unusual solution for Austen, who resented 'unnatural conduct & forced difficulties' in novels, and the kind

of exaggerated propriety adopted by heroines (or rather their authors) to separate lovers and manufacture plot (*L*, 126).

Emma's imaginism places her in the tradition of quixotic heroines whose romance- and novel-tainted thinking produced some of the most intellectually and fictionally sophisticated novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The figure of the quixote – from Don Quixote to Emma's namesake Emma Bovary – is essential to the development and evolution of the novel as a genre, promoting the self-reflexivity, promiscuous inter-generic and intra-generic allusion, and meditations on realism and reality that are the genre's hallmarks. Austen, in *Emma*, also evinces our sympathy for a heroine whose intellectual abilities are diverted into ridiculousness simply because they are unchallenged by her unexciting life in a small village. 'Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family,' says Mr Knightley, but as a woman, and a wealthy woman, she has been denied the education, or the profession, that might challenge her (*E*, 37).

The message of the English quixote novel is – over and over – that women must not aspire to have the kinds of adventures that happen in books. Jane West reminds us that 'Adventures *rarely* happen to a prudent woman, and *never* without injury to her reputation.'<sup>39</sup> The 'greater evil' of the novel, argues Clara Reeve, is not that its readers 'will be disgusted with everything serious or solid', but that 'seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart, – the passions are awakened, – false expectations are raised. – A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues.'<sup>40</sup> As the Countess explains to Arabella in *The Female Quixote*: 'The Word Adventures carries in it so free and licentious a Sound in the Apprehensions of People at this Period of Time, that it can hardly with Propriety be apply'd to those few and natural Incidents which compose the History of a Woman of Honour.'<sup>41</sup> Those commentators who do approve of novels never attempt to claim that women may enjoy 'adventures' without damaging consequence. Writing on the use of novels in educating children, specifically *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, Maria Edgeworth and her father argue that

To girls this species of reading cannot be as dangerous as it is to boys; girls must very soon perceive the impossibility of rambling about the world in quest of adventures: and where there appears an obvious impossibility in gratifying any wish, it is not likely to become, or at least to continue, a torment to the imagination.<sup>42</sup>

The 'impossibility in gratifying any wish' for adventure is the depressing truth at the heart of quixote fiction, and especially of *Emma*. 'I must beg you not to talk of the sea. It makes me envious and miserable,' says Emma, 'I who have never seen it!' (*E*, 101). Let us not forget that Emma has a large income and a carriage at her disposal, and lives on an island only 250 miles (402 kilometres) across at its widest point. Her planned honeymoon

trip – ‘a fortnight’s absence in a tour to the sea-side’, is a deliberate anticlimax (*E*, 483). What Austen achieves in *Emma* is a stationary novel, a triumph of domestic fiction, in which the heroine’s ordeals are moral, her suffering is mental, and she never travels more than seven miles from her home. Emma’s – and *Emma*’s – confinement, however, is ultimately liberating for the novel, allowing the great nineteenth-century achievements of moral fiction to mark their characters’ journeys by personal growth rather than coach-stages. Without Highbury, there can be no Barsetshire or Middlemarch.

\* \* \* \* \*

But the greatest maim given to that reception which the writings of our society have formerly received ... hath been a very superficial vein among many readers of the present age, who will by no means be persuaded to inspect beyond the surface and the rind of things.

– Jonathan Swift<sup>43</sup>

M<sup>rs</sup> Guiton – thought it too natural to be interesting ...

M<sup>r</sup> Cockerelle – liked it so little, that Fanny w<sup>d</sup> not send me his opinion ...

M<sup>r</sup> B. Lefroy – thought that if there had been more Incident, it would be equal to any of the others ...

M<sup>r</sup> Fowle – read only the first & last Chapters, because he had heard it was not interesting

‘Opinions of *Emma*’ (*MW*, 437–9)

If the ‘Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters’ spoofs the kind of fiction that everybody wants to read, *Emma* is what nobody wants to read, a kind of anti-novel. *Emma* is, in fact, the opposite of the ‘Plan’ – a novel in which, as Austen’s contemporary Susan Ferrier remarked, there is ‘no story whatever’.<sup>44</sup> Of course *Emma*’s unprecedented plot ultimately hinges on the fact that there are too many stories: its proliferating subplots (including those that exist only in Emma’s mind) threaten to wrest control and happiness from their would-be author – the matchmaking, self-styled imaginist, Emma Woodhouse. Before and beneath all this, however, is a novel so radically different from all that came before it, as to make it almost unrecognisable as such to its first readers, and deeply unpalatable to many of them.

Like all of Austen’s novels, *Emma* was partly generated by her critical response to the fiction of her time. I have already touched on the way in which the opening of the ‘Plan of a Novel’ encourages a rereading of *Emma*’s first chapter that takes into account its debts to the conventional novelistic setting used in *Hermesprong*, *The Recess*, *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, *Emmeline*

and others. The complexity of *Emma's* structure, and its meditations on the subject of reading, suggest that, in this novel written over just 14 months, Austen was working out ideas that had been fomenting for some time.<sup>45</sup> The catalyst for the novel, however, seems to have been a straightforward reaction to a new work by an author Austen considered her competition – Mary Brunton's 1814 novel *Discipline*.

*Discipline* is a fictional autobiography with a strong religious theme of sin, repentance and redemption. Its heroine, Ellen Percy, is as handsome and clever as Emma Woodhouse, and considerably more rich and selfish. Educated in a fashionable London seminary, she is also more accomplished. 'It is a confounded pity she is a girl,' says Ellen's father, 'If she had been of the right sort, she might have got into Parliament, and made a figure with the best of them. But now what use is her sense of?' Ellen, like Emma, is too clever to easily play the role of happy young lady. In Jane Fairfax's place Ellen has an elegant, talented rival, her resentment of whom has 'too little dignity to bear the name of hatred', and a follower, like Harriet Smith, with 'an instinctive preference for companions superior to herself in rank and fortune'. Ellen's deceitful pseudo-admirer Lord Frederick de Burgh is, like Frank Churchill, 'handsome, showy, extravagant ... a very Cædipus in expounding anagrams and conundrums'. *Discipline* even has a harmless, maternal old maid, whom the heroine must learn to treat with respect. Unlike Miss Bates, however, Miss Mortimer, who 'has no wit', and 'has never been pretty', is not poor, and has exactly the kind of endlessly forgiving non-personality recommended by conduct-book writers as the essence of feminine agreeability. Like Emma, Ellen is watched over by a disapproving mentor figure, whom Ellen eventually comes to love. Before they can be united, however, Ellen loses her father to suicide and his money to bankruptcy, and is forced to earn her living as a much-abused governess in Scotland; ultimately becoming the object of a highland chieftain's charity. By this time Ellen is an entirely reformed character, her new-found humility and Christian deportment accounting for the self-chastising tone in which she, as narrator, recounts her prodigal days. Like Emma, however, Ellen vows to reform more than once over the course of the novel, and is often unsuccessful. 'How often, I may say how invariably, did my better feelings vanish, ere they issued into action!'<sup>46</sup>

Austen's linguistic allusions to *Discipline* in *Emma* draw the reader's attention to the two novels' intimate connection. 'I started, as if a dart had pierced me,' confesses Ellen, when she hears the hero is going abroad, while the knowledge that Emma loves Mr Knightley 'darted through her, with the speed of an arrow' (*E*, 408). The proposal scenes of both novels demonstrate a similar reticence: 'But hold! I will not tell what he said. If Henry Graham for once spoke nonsense, it would ill become me to record it. Nor will I relate my answer, because, in truth, I know not what it was.'<sup>47</sup> Emma's response to Mr Knightley's proposal, though more famous, is no

more informative. 'What did she say? – Just what she ought, of course' (431).<sup>48</sup>

Brunton prefaces her novel with the kind of statement which, in the aggrieved author of *Northanger Abbey*, must have provoked a splenetic response. 'The appetite for fiction is indeed universal,' Brunton writes, 'and has unfortunately been made the occasion of conveying poison of every description into the youthful mind.'<sup>49</sup> Brunton's express aim in writing *Discipline* is, as its title suggests, the inculcation of morality through fiction that is (perhaps contradictorily) some of the raciest and most adventurous available in 1814. Austen, unsurprisingly, rejects Brunton's didacticism wholeheartedly. She also tones down Brunton's heroine, and Emma Woodhouse has none of Ellen Percy's monstrous tendencies. Emma's recognition of her own faults, and her resolution to do better, is likewise nowhere near as glaring an about-face as Ellen's spiritual rebirth. Nor – while the Ellen Percy of *Discipline's* conclusion is a different creature altogether from the one first introduced – is the reader convinced that Emma's reformation is permanent. When she realises that it 'was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together', Emma is 'quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more', but immediately finding herself considering another match for Harriet, 'she stopt to blush and laugh at her own relapse' (*E*, 137).<sup>50</sup> Yet Austen retains enough similarities to *Discipline* to encourage her readers to recognise and pursue the connection between the two novels. With essentially the same matter to begin with, Austen demonstrates the utmost possibilities of her art.

The negative reactions Austen met with on the publication of *Emma* can be ascribed to the fact that her novel was too much unlike *Discipline* – the good and bad are insufficiently distinct; there is too little 'incident'; the heroine is far from ideal – criticisms that could never be levelled at Brunton's novel. *Discipline*, in fact, is exactly the kind of novel that Scott contrasts with Austen's in his review of *Emma*:

The heroine was usually condemned to equal hardship and hazards. She was regularly exposed to being forcibly carried off like a Sabine virgin by some frantic admirer. And even if she escaped the terrors of masked ruffians, an insidious ravisher, a cloak wrapped forcibly around her head, and a coach with the blinds up driving she could not conjecture whither, she had still her share of wandering, of poverty, of obloquy, of seclusion, and of imprisonment, and was frequently extended upon a bed of sickness, and reduced to her last shilling before the author condescended to shield her from persecution.<sup>51</sup>

*Discipline* ticks just about all Scott's boxes, but the 'insidious ravisher' and the 'masked ruffians' are one and the same. That said, Scott's inventory also

recalls the plots of Burney's *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*, as well as numerous other novels by 'reputable' writers.

The contrasting lack of incident, or, as Austen's first readers put it, 'interest' in the main plot of *Emma* must be seen as a deliberate experiment in the novel form. It is the pinnacle of Austen's critical achievement because it succeeds in producing, from the picked-over generic conventions that had previously comprised the novel's skeleton, something entirely new. *Clarissa*, with a smaller cast and sparser plot than *Emma*, might seem an antecedent: but the epic subject and ambition of Richardson's masterpiece effectively remove it from the category of the novel, and particularly that of the domestic fiction within which Austen exclusively operates. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* – set predominantly in Shandy Hall and its environs – likewise is at once more and less than a novel, and its comic circularity makes it, in Johnson's word, 'odd', a novel that does not truly belong to any genre.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast, *Emma* is solidly, unquestionably a novel, and the text's meditations on its own generic status only confirm this. The following passage has descendants in almost every major realist novel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it has no precedent in the fiction of Austen's time. Coming nearly at the midpoint of the novel and masquerading as simple, realist description, it operates as a manifesto for fictional realism, while demonstrating the persistence of Emma Woodhouse's own novelising tendencies:

Emma went to the door for amusement. – Much could not be hoped from the traffic of even the busiest part of Highbury; – Mr. Perry walking hastily by, Mr. William Cox letting himself in at the office door, Mr. Cole's carriage horses returning from exercise, or a stray letter-boy on an obstinate mule, were the liveliest objects she could presume to expect; and when her eyes fell only on the butcher with his tray, a tidy old woman travelling homewards from shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone, and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread, she knew she had no reason to complain, and was amused enough; quite enough still to stand at the door. A mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer. (*E*, 233)

For once Emma the imaginist sees fairly clearly. What she 'presume[s] to expect' to see – Mr Perry, the obstinate mule – is only slightly more interesting than what she actually does see. Moreover, she is content with 'seeing nothing': unlike many of *Emma*'s first readers, she is 'amused enough' with the quotidian happenings of Highbury. What Emma sees from Ford's window is the confrontation of realism with what she believes to be reality. The livelier objects of Emma's imagination are replaced by the

more varied ones of Austen's, and these objects are so irrelevant to the story that all of them – the butcher, the old woman, the dawdling children – are anonymous. Here, Austen demonstrates to her own heroine (and through her, the reader) the true 'reality effect' that is the essence of realism.

This level of realism, however, is too extreme to sustain in such a novel, and once she has made her point, Austen rapidly returns to the narrative:

She looked down the Randalls road. The scene enlarged; two persons appeared; Mrs. Weston and her son-in-law; they were walking into Highbury; – to Hartfield of course. They were stopping, however, in the first place at Mrs. Bates's; whose house was a little nearer Randalls than Ford's; and had all but knocked, when Emma caught their eye. – Immediately they crossed the road and came forward to her; and the agreeableness of yesterday's engagement seemed to give fresh pleasure to the present meeting. (*E*, 233)

And here Emma, with her self-satisfied aphorism that a 'mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer' is shown once again to be the butt of the narrator's joke. While Mrs Weston and Frank Churchill are certainly walking into Highbury, their intention of travelling on to Hartfield is purely Emma's conjecture. The novel's rereaders can guess that it is Jane Fairfax at Mrs Bates's house that Frank truly intends to visit, and that Emma's interruption is more likely a source of annoyance to him than a 'fresh pleasure'. The irony is that a spectator who sees 'nothing that does not answer' is probably seeing only what they want to see, which may be more than is really there.

Like other quixotic heroines before her, Emma has a habit of turning everything she sees into a romance plot. In contrast to the usual strategies of quixotic fictions, however, Emma's delusions, while wide of the mark, are still firmly fixed in the realist genre within which she, as a character, exists. This is what makes them so dangerous. Arabella of *The Female Quixote* can be easily disabused of her attachment to outdated romances, and even Catherine Morland can be persuaded to recognise the geographic and temporal boundaries of the gothic novels she loves. Harriet Smith's affection for Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* renders her suggestible, but only to Emma's own fantasies of romance. Once Emma realises she is not in one kind of novel, however, she promptly substitutes the failed plot for another. If the beautiful, untutored innocent (à la Rousseau's Sophie) fails to tempt Mr Elton, Emma reasons, Harriet cannot help but marry the superior Frank Churchill who has, after all, rescued her from gypsies. In the topsy-turvy domain of Highbury, confusion reigns. Emma smugly quotes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to justify her matchmaking of Harriet Smith and Mr Elton. Liking her own home to the play's fairy-infested

forest, and presumably casting herself as Titania, the fairy queen, Emma says to Harriet:

'There does seem to be a something in the air of Hartfield which gives love exactly the right direction, and sends it into the very channel where it ought to flow.

The course of true love never did run smooth –

A Hartfield edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage.' (E, 75)

It is rare for one of Austen's characters to indulge in the explicit quotation beloved of Romantic-era heroines. Much in the same way that Joyce will later have Stephen Dedalus think of himself as Hamlet, while the reader knows he is not a character in Shakespeare's tragedy, but in *Ulysses*, Joyce's (and Homer's) epic, Austen allows Emma to imaginatively misattribute herself. In doing so she offers the reader a literary red herring. While Harriet may fall in and out of love as if she is subject to one of Puck's spells, *Emma* takes its cues from a different Shakespearean comedy.

Emma, who has 'very little intention of ever marrying at all', yet is happy to consider Frank Churchill as a potential husband (E, 84), resembles Olivia, the 'too proud' heiress of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, whose resolution to live 'like a cloistress' is quickly abandoned when she meets Viola, disguised as a boy. Olivia's intention not to 'match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit' shows her desire to retain the power and independence of her spinsterhood in marriage, just as Emma recognises 'I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield' (E, 84).<sup>53</sup> Olivia's steward Malvolio – customarily dressed in black – whose vanity and ambition lead him to believe he is loved by his mistress, is matched by the 'spruce, black, and smiling' Mr Elton, whose aspiration to marry Emma ends in her mortification and humiliation (E, 114).<sup>54</sup> The broader themes of deliberate misrepresentation, and self-serving delusions – problems, essentially, of epistemology – are at the heart of *Emma's* relationship to *Twelfth Night*. The following passage from the play, with its demanding need to pick through carefully its apparently opaque riddling, requires the same penetrating readership as *Emma*:

OLIVIA Stay:

I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.

VIOLA That you do think you are not what you are.

OLIVIA If I think so, I think the same of you.

VIOLA Then think you right, I am not what I am.

OLIVIA I would you were as I would have you be.

VIOLA Would it be better, madam, than I am?<sup>55</sup>

Like Olivia, Emma wishes everyone – Harriet Smith, Mr Elton, Robert Martin, Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill and the rest – would be as she would have them be. As an ‘Imaginist’, she refuses to see people as they are.

Thomas Rand has noted ‘parallels between Emma’s misreading of Mr. Elton’s charade and Malvolio’s reading of Maria’s letter in *Twelfth Night*’.<sup>56</sup> Canny readers may also realise that Mr Weston’s Box Hill riddle – ‘what two letters ... express perfection ... M. and A. – Em – ma’ gestures towards Malvolio’s over-interpreted note (*E*, 371):

what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me. Softly – ‘M.O.A.I.’ ... ‘M.’ Malvolio. ‘M’ – why, that begins my name ... But then there is no consonancy in the sequel. That suffers under probation: ‘A’ should follow, but ‘O’ does ... ‘M.O.A.I.’ This simulation is not as the former; and yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name.<sup>57</sup>

Once it has been ‘crush[ed] a little’, just about any data becomes the evidence a sloppy or biased reader wishes it to be. The lesson *Emma*’s readers – that is, readers of *Emma* as well as readers *within* the novel – must learn, however, is to see only what is there, and not to manipulate facts to fit their own wishful thinking. The mystery writer P. D. James has argued for *Emma*’s status as a detective novel, but it is a detective novel peopled by Dr Watsons and Captain Hastingses, and the role customarily played by Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot is taken by Austen herself.<sup>58</sup> Only one character is permitted an early moment of clarity:

Mr. Knightley, who, for some reason best known to himself, had certainly taken an early dislike to Frank Churchill, was only growing to dislike him more. He began to suspect him of some double dealing in his pursuit of Emma. That Emma was his object appeared indisputable. Every thing declared it; his own attentions, his father’s hints, his mother-in-law’s guarded silence; it was all in unison; words, conduct, discretion, and indiscretion, told the same story. But while so many were devoting him to Emma, and Emma herself making him over to Harriet, Mr. Knightley began to suspect him of some inclination to trifle with Jane Fairfax. He could not understand it; but there were symptoms of intelligence between them – he thought so at least – symptoms of admiration on his side, which, having once observed, he could not persuade himself to think entirely void of meaning, however he might wish to escape any of Emma’s errors of imagination. *She* was not present when the suspicion first arose. He was dining with the Randalls family, and Jane, at the

Eltons'; and he had seen a look, more than a single look, at Miss Fairfax, which, from the admirer of Miss Woodhouse, seemed somewhat out of place. When he was again in their company, he could not help remembering what he had seen; nor could he avoid observations which, unless it were like Cowper and his fire at twilight,

'Myself creating what I saw,'

brought him yet stronger suspicion of there being a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane. (*E*, 343–4)

With these suspicions in mind, Mr Knightley continues to gather evidence of an 'understanding' between Frank and Jane. The 'reason best known to himself', however, namely his love of Emma and jealous resentment of Frank Churchill, prevents him from making a full investigation, and so he remains unhappily ignorant of Emma's romantic indifference to Frank.

It is not to be expected that any character within *Emma* might be able to exercise the kind of judgment of its creator, or perform the kind of judicious reading that Austen's text ultimately demands. This does not prevent Austen from demonstrating how her characters can be *taught* to read, and to judge clearly. 'To read with profit and advantage', writes Wollstonecraft, 'we should read with attention and deliberation, and endeavour to improve the truths we read by remembrance. Without attention in reading it is impossible to remember, and without remembering it is time and labour lost to read or learn.'<sup>59</sup> The detective-fiction plot of *Emma* forces its readers to attend to and remember well even the minutiae of the text: from the contents of Miss Bates's long speeches to Jane Fairfax's rainy expeditions to the Post Office, and Frank Churchill's 'dream' regarding Mr Perry setting up a coach (*E*, 345).

There are further tests, for Emma and her readers, throughout the novel. How do we interpret Mr Elton's charade? When Emma misattributes its intended recipient, she also misjudges its quality: 'An excellent charade indeed! and very much to the purpose' (*E*, 72). She revises her opinion, however, once she learns the truth of his intentions. 'To be sure, the charade, with its "ready wit" – but then, the "soft eyes" – in fact it suited neither; it was a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense?' (*E*, 134). Reading the letters of Frank Churchill – a more sophisticated and manipulative writer by far than Mr Elton – proves more difficult. In scenes that echo the dialogic structure of Reeve's *Progress of Romance*, along with the critical conversations taking place in salons and Romantic poets' drawing rooms, Emma and Mr Knightley compare readings of Frank's letters. Very few of the

letters Frank sends to Highbury are actually read by Emma or Mr Knightley – some are censored by Mrs Weston, while the majority are love letters read only by Jane Fairfax – and only Frank's final, explanatory letter is substantially reproduced in the text. Yet many of Frank's earlier letters are quoted from and discussed around Highbury, and for most of the novel Frank is absent from the village, and his presence in the text is maintained through letters alone.

In construing these letters, Emma inadvertently at first, and then deliberately, takes the role of devil's advocate to Mr Knightley's Francis-Jeffrey-like criticism, in a lengthy dialogue comprising the final chapter of the novel's first volume. After the news of Frank's first visit has made the rounds of Highbury, Emma is the first to inform Mr Knightley that Frank's arrival has been put off:

[Emma] exclaimed quite as much as was necessary, (or, being acting a part, perhaps rather more,) at the conduct of the Churchills, in keeping him away. She then proceeded to say a good deal more than she felt ... found herself directly involved in a disagreement with Mr. Knightley; and, to her great amusement, perceived that she was taking the other side of the question from her real opinion, and making use of Mrs. Weston's arguments against herself. (*E*, 145)

The dialogue that follows shows Emma and Mr Knightley working against each other to establish the primacy of two different interpretations of Frank's letter. Austen complicates their exchange by allowing neither of her characters the role of disinterested critic: Emma is really spouting opinions she has learned from Mrs Weston, which neither she nor probably Mrs Weston herself believes, while Mr Knightley's jealousy of Frank debars him from any claim to critical impartiality:

'The Churchills are very likely in fault,' said Mr Knightley, coolly; 'but I dare say he might come if he would.'

'I do not know why you should say so. He wishes exceedingly to come; but his uncle and aunt will not spare him.'

'I cannot believe that he has not the power of coming, if he made a point of it. It is too unlikely, for me to believe it without proof.'

'How odd you are! What has Mr. Frank Churchill done, to make you suppose him such an unnatural creature?' (*E*, 145)

Both Emma and Mr Knightley demand 'proof' before they will accept one another's arguments, although both know that proof is unavailable. They have their text (Frank's letter), and little else to corroborate it. They supply this deficiency with the kind of imaginative criticism that is fundamental

to the novel and to its study. 'I am not supposing him at all an unnatural creature,' continues Mr Knightley,

'in suspecting that he may have learnt to be above his connections, and to care very little for any thing but his own pleasure, from living with those who have always set him the example of it ... If Frank Churchill had wanted to see his father, he would have contrived it ... A man at his age – what is he? – three or four-and-twenty – cannot be without the means of doing as much as that. It is impossible.'

Emma responds:

'That's easily said, and easily felt by you, who have always been your own master. You are the worst judge in the world, Mr. Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence. You do not know what it is to have tempers to manage.'

'It is not to be conceived that a man of three or four-and-twenty should not have liberty of mind or limb to that amount. He cannot want money – he cannot want leisure. We know, on the contrary, that he has so much of both, that he is glad to get rid of them at the idlest haunts in the kingdom. We hear of him for ever at some watering-place or other. A little while ago, he was at Weymouth. This proves that he can leave the Churchills.'

'Yes, sometimes he can.'

'And those times are, whenever he thinks it worth his while' (*E*, 145–6)

Here the partiality of Mr Knightley's criticism comes to the fore. Like the magisterially partisan critics of the two leading reviews, Mr Knightley carries on his argument with unabashed disdain for his subject, amounting to a silly exaggeration that is at odds with his dignified, gentlemanly character: 'It is not to be conceived', 'the idlest haunts in the kingdom', 'We hear of him for ever'. At this point it is unsurprising that Emma is goaded into opposition for its own sake.

Mr Knightley's increasingly outrageous language demands countering, but rather than attacking his argument, Emma counters with a too-forgiving relativism that an ethical novelist cannot condone. 'It is very unfair to judge of any body's conduct,' she asserts, 'without an intimate knowledge of their situation. Nobody, who has not been in the interior of a family, can say what the difficulties of any individual of that family may be' (*E*, 146). This statement is so amorphously lacking in critical judgment that the reader cannot help but feel that neither Emma nor her narrator truly subscribe to such self-conscious imprecision. We recognise also, that Emma and her creator must maintain the aura of ambivalence surrounding Frank Churchill, so as not to explode the potential love-plot between him and the heroine.

Mr Knightley's definitive moral declaration, 'There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty' (echoing Nelson's famous message before the Battle of Trafalgar) has all the forceful rhetoric by which concepts such as nation, honour and masculinity are constructed (*E*, 146).

Emma's answer to this argument, however, shows the situation to be more complex than Mr Knightley accepts. She says, 'you have not an idea of what is requisite in situations directly opposite to your own. Mr. Frank Churchill to be making such a speech as that to the uncle and aunt, who have brought him up, and are to provide for him!' (*E*, 147). Like Austen, Emma understands that, for some people, duties conflict. It is this that makes Trilling's comment that the 'extraordinary thing about Emma is that she has a moral life as a man has a moral life' so difficult, in its sexism, to accept.<sup>60</sup> What Emma – and Austen – do in fact show here is that women's moral lives have more, and more complex, claims to negotiate than the abstract issues of duty, honour and even gentlemanliness that govern men's ethics in the period. Sometimes, as much heroism and sacrifice is required to 'guard the comfort' of others as to guard the kingdom (*E*, 435). While Austen will explore this issue further in *Persuasion*, in *Emma* Frank Churchill operates as a test case, that of a kind of 'womanly man' – a man living with some of the domestic and moral obligations of a woman.<sup>61</sup>

Women in Austen live (by and large) in families and communities where they must be silent when they would rather speak, and speak and be sociable when they would rather be alone. They endure tedium and even insult without outward reaction. Jane West argues that 'Virtue is more severely tried by a *multiplicity* of petty evils, than by *great* conflicts,' and it is in the dramatisation of this maxim that Austen's characters demonstrate their heroism.<sup>62</sup> Evidence provided with the plot's unfolding suggests that Mr Knightley has judged Frank rightly; nevertheless, Mr Knightley is also made to learn 'what is requisite in situations' different to his own, when he moves into Hartfield on his marriage. Such a loss of independence is unprecedented in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction, and a mark of the new heroism that Austen attempts to establish with the character of Mr Knightley.

While the gentlemanly Mr Knightley has clear Grandisonian antecedents (without any of Sir Charles's exasperating perfectionism), Frank Churchill belongs to a different tradition of ambivalently 'good' heroes. He is far from being as dangerously dandified as Lord Frederick de Burgh from Brunton's *Discipline*, but he does share many of the ambiguous qualities of Edgeworth's Clarence Hervey. Hervey, writes Edgeworth, 'might have been more than a pleasant young man, if he had not been smitten with the desire of being thought superiour in every thing, and of being the most admired person in all companies'. It is perhaps his resemblance to Hervey that leads Emma to match Frank with Harriet in her mind. Harriet, after all, is the closest *Emma* comes to a perfect, country-bred innocent like the New Forest girl Hervey

buys after deciding on 'educating a wife for himself' following the plan of Rousseau's Sophie.<sup>63</sup> While Edgeworth seems interested in this episode only so far as she can use it to refute Rousseau's educational policy for girls, it has all the ingredients of one of the nastier episodes of paedophilic 'grooming' to be found in novels of the period (a period in which the Abelard-and-Heloïse school of pedagogical romance flourished). Austen recognises the fundamentally disturbing nature of Hervey's plan, however, and reintroduces it unexpectedly in *Emma*. While Frank Churchill never thinks of Harriet Smith – after all, as Mr Knightley says, 'Men of sense ... do not want silly wives' (*E*, 64) – he does reveal himself to be as much of a novelist as Emma, or Clarence Hervey, in choosing and manipulating his own heroine. Once the secret of their engagement is revealed, Frank's sinister attitude towards Jane Fairfax is made clear:

'Did you ever see such a skin? – such smoothness! such delicacy! – and yet without being actually fair. – One cannot call her fair. It is a most uncommon complexion, with her dark eye-lashes and hair – a most distinguishing complexion! – So peculiarly the lady in it. – Just colour enough for beauty ... She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. – You will be glad to hear (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair?' (*E*, 478–9)

She is to him an *objet d'art*, a marmoreal Galatea, made for decorating, exhibiting and admiring rather than really loving, an angel rather than a human being.

Frank Churchill's objectification of Jane Fairfax allows an air of tragedy to temper the otherwise harmonious comic ending of the novel. Jane has all the characteristics of a perfect Romantic-era heroine. She is exactly what Austen's niece Fanny Knight demanded in the 'Plan of a Novel': 'faultless ... very highly accomplished, understanding modern Languages & (generally speaking) everything that the most accomplished young Women learn' (*MW*, 428). Unlike Emma, whose humanity, while fictional, is unassailable, Jane is a picture of perfection, whose tragedy is to be admired only as a picture, not as a person. This is, perhaps, Austen's most crushing indictment of the politics of the novel. As a medium, it has all the power and potential to be a tool of liberation for women, or at least one by which women's claim to full personhood might be established and explored. Yet the typical novel's heroine, with her two-dimensional virtue, tends to be less useful to a feminist project than the text of a conduct book. Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that Milton 'in the true Mahometan strain ... meant to deprive [women] of souls', and the fictional heroines of the eighteenth century show that

novelists followed suit.<sup>64</sup> Austen is one of the first novelists to present female characters with faults and mental processes that approach those of a 'real' person, and it is essential that we read her realism in this context as having conscious political intent, as she writes against so much of the literature of her contemporaries and predecessors.

This issue – of the politics and ethics of representations of gender in the novel – is central to Austen's ongoing literary project, an issue that she will return to most fully in *Persuasion*. While, as I have argued, it is also important to *Emma*, it is not *Emma's* most crucial theme.

In the eighteenth chapter, mostly composed of this dialogue between Mr Knightley and Emma, we see both characters attempt to parse the moral questions raised by Frank's letter of excuse. By the time that the issue of Frank's character is finally resolved, it has almost become redundant to the novel's plot, and irrelevant to the reader. The narrative is ironically aware of this, and teases the reader with the knowledge. Like Emma, we have not 'the slightest inclination for thinking of' anything but our heroine's happy love, 'when a letter was brought her from Randall's'. The reader's feelings and Emma's for once coincide. It is 'a very thick letter; – she guessed what it must contain, and deprecated the necessity of reading it. – She was now in perfect charity with Frank Churchill; she wanted no explanations, she wanted only to have her thoughts to herself ... It must be waded through, however' (*E*, 436). Here Emma seems to voice the groans of, for example, one of Ann Radcliffe's readers, faced with the inevitable dragging explanation of the preceding plot – a plot that (at least in *Emma's* case) we have already unravelled.

The aim of Austen's lesson here is not that we understand Frank's behaviour and his motivations. Nor is it that we recognise the clues littering the novel. Even the 'dull elves' of Austen's readership will by this point have caught up with Emma, and, like her, be uninterested in anything not concerning her engagement to Mr Knightley. Yet once again, Austen deprives her readers of the simple enjoyment promised by the romantic novel as a genre: the chance to revel briefly in the oxytocin-induced pleasures of love triumphant. The phrase 'It must be waded through' seems almost sadistic, as does the mix of volubility and inconsequence in the rest of the chapter. Frank Churchill turns out to be the fluid, plausible, prosy correspondent we could have imagined, both from his conversation, and from the fact that he exists for so much of the novel only through his letters, and yet exists vividly. Why then, does Austen force her readers through an exercise she is aware – even laughingly aware – they must resent?

The answer comes in the following chapter. 'This epistle,' in Brunton's phrase, 'is a master-teacher.'<sup>65</sup> Just as we had once read Darcy's letter along with Elizabeth Bennet, and learned to adjust our ideas accordingly as she did, now we must, in concert with at least three other Highbury citizens, take our turn in reading another letter. This time, however, Austen has no

intention of persuading us to re-evaluate a character, or any aspect of the novel's plot. What we are desired to learn is the much more difficult matter of how to read: how to read, that is, properly and *critically*. Mr Knightley leads the tutorial, telling Emma, that it 'will be natural for me ... to speak my opinion aloud as I read' (*E*, 445). His 'opinions' that follow, with their disjointed phrases, abbreviated quotation, and multiple dashes, operate like an editor's marginal annotations on a manuscript:

'He trifles here ... as to the temptation. He knows he is wrong, and has nothing rational to urge. – Bad. – He ought not to have formed the engagement. – 'His father's disposition:' – he is unjust, however, to his father. Mr. Weston's sanguine temper was a blessing on all his upright and honourable exertions; but Mr. Weston earned every present comfort before he endeavoured to gain it. – Very true; he did not come till Miss Fairfax was here' ...

When he came to Miss Woodhouse, he was obliged to read the whole of it aloud – all that related to her, with a smile; a look; a shake of the head; a word or two of assent, or disapprobation; or merely of love, as the subject required; concluding, however, seriously, and, after steady reflection, thus –

'Very bad – though it might have been worse. – Playing a most dangerous game. Too much indebted to the event for his acquittal. – No judge of his own manners by you. – Always deceived in fact by his own wishes, and regardless of little besides his own convenience. – Fancying you to have fathomed his secret. Natural enough! – his own mind full of intrigue, that he should suspect it in others. – Mystery; Finesse – how they pervert the understanding! My Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?' (*E*, 445–6)

Mr Knightley reads and comments aloud for several more pages, before finishing the letter that Mrs Weston, Emma and we (the readers of *Emma*) have also read. Mr Knightley's syntax, as he reads, is reminiscent of Austen's shorthand style in the 'Opinions' of *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*. Mr Knightley is as competent a critic as any Austen seems to have met with in her circle of readers, and the confident brevity of his summing-up – the 'plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English' with which he charitably dismisses Frank's 'faults' – carries the unimpeachable tone of the Reviews. 'I am very ready to believe his character will improve', is Mr Knightley's final judgment on Frank Churchill (*E*, 448).

Mr Knightley is a competent critic. This is not to suggest, however, that he is Austen's ideal reader, or even the best reader in *Emma*. While he has been shielded from its workings for much of the novel, Austen's irony refuses to allow Mr Knightley the privilege of being incontestably right. His hopelessly

idealistic declaration, 'does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings', is only agreed to by Emma with a 'blush', which she cannot 'give any *sincere* explanation of' (*E*, 446, my emphasis). Emma has no intention of allowing her fiancé an *éclaircissement* of the aborted Harriet–Knightley–Emma subplot, and so in the heuristic hierarchy of the novel, Emma ends in a position of superiority. It is *Emma's* readers, however, whom Austen ultimately allows to triumph.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that Austen criticism is notable 'for its unrelenting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught A Lesson'.<sup>66</sup> Sedgwick realises that it is Austen's readers who are most in need of education, and her learning heroines stand in for us. In Emma's words, 'there is a likeness in our destiny' (*E*, 478). Austen created the taste by which she was to be relished, a taste for complex, ironic, profound and truly *novel* fiction, by creating her own, 'judicious' readership. *Emma* enacts, to a greater and more sophisticated extent than any of Austen's other works, this process of creation through education.

## 6

### ‘Bad Morality to Conclude With’: *Persuasion* and the Last Works

We are quite aware that there are few instances of first attachment being brought to a happy conclusion ... But the youth of this realm need not at present be taught the doctrine of selfishness ... Who is it, that in his youth has felt a virtuous attachment, however romantic or however unfortunate, but can trace back to its influence much that his character may possess of what is honourable, dignified, and disinterested?

– Walter Scott<sup>1</sup>

‘I am myself a sad example of the Miseries, in general attendant on a first Love & I am determined for the future to avoid the like Misfortune. I wish it may not be too late for you to do the same; if it is not endeavour my dear Girl to secure yourself from so great a Danger. A second attachment is seldom attended with any serious consequences; against *that* therefore I have nothing to say. Preserve yourself from a first Love & you need not fear a second.’

‘Jack and Alice’ (*MW*, 16)

Jane Austen, wrote her brother Henry, ‘seldom changed her opinions either on books or men’ (*NA*, 7). In *Persuasion*, her novel of first love revived, the presence of Austen’s first loves – the books that inspired her to become ‘THE AUTHOR’ – is strongly felt. In her excellent monograph, *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*, Jocelyn Harris suggests several sources for the origins of *Persuasion*: Sarah Scott’s 1762 novel of a utopian feminist community, *Millenium Hall*; a story recounted by Oliver Goldsmith in his *Life* of Bath legend Beau Nash; Austen’s own reflections on the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo; and her response to harsh criticisms of Frances Burney’s last novel *The Wanderer*. Austen’s use of these heterogeneous elements (third-hand gossip, political debate, new and forgotten novels and poetry) is typical of

her artistic practice in weaving together in fiction strands of thought that are otherwise unconnected. This artistic strategy of Austen's recalls Bakhtin's insistence on the heteroglossia of the novel, its compulsion to absorb other genres and to allow their several voices to be equally heard. Harris insists on the shared significance of these sources, and ultimately constructs a compelling narrative for reading *Persuasion*, in which the idealised, fictional eighteenth-century hero Sir Charles Grandison (Mr Elliot) is replaced in heroic pre-eminence by the historic Captain James Cook (in the form of Captain Wentworth), naval celebrity and British 'discoverer' of Australia's east coast, New Zealand and Hawaii.<sup>2</sup>

*Persuasion*, more than any of Austen's other novels, also embeds references to her own early fiction. Thirty years separates the composition of *Persuasion* and that of 'Jack and Alice: A Novel' (1787) which, like Austen's last completed novel, is a tale of unrequited love, officious advice and grotesque vanity. Austen's whole literary career falls between those years of 1787 and 1817, the year of her death. Nevertheless, at these extremes of her artistic development are strange affinities; surprising shared preoccupations between the short, crazy burlesque from *Volume the First* and her final masterpiece. Reading *Persuasion* and 'Jack and Alice' together reveals their common concerns, some of which seem almost anachronistic amongst *Persuasion's* determined, if ironic, Romanticism. These concerns are more than merely repeated tropes or even just self-reflexivity: they are the literary preoccupations that lie at the heart of Austen's attitudes towards fiction, and are the source of her critical creativity throughout her writing life.

Considering the large industry devoted to the criticism of Austen's adult writing, her juvenilia has been the subject of comparative neglect. While it is worth studying for its own sake, analysis of Austen's juvenilia offers new approaches to reading her later fiction. The special relationship between 'Jack and Alice' and *Persuasion* adds to the evidence that Austen remembered and returned to her juvenilia throughout her career. The very fact of the juvenilia's survival is due to Austen's transcriptions (including some amendments) of her early writing in three fair-copy volumes which were carefully preserved by her family.<sup>3</sup> 'Jack and Alice', a story of approximately 5500 words, features one of the juvenilia's most memorable heroines, the indomitable Alice Johnson – a young woman who 'has many rare & charming qualities, but Sobriety is not one of them' (*MW*, 23). Like most of the stories in the juvenilia, it burlesques the literature that Austen grew up reading. She spoofs, for example, Samuel Johnson's aphoristic style: Lady Williams, 'a widow with a handsome Jointure & the remains of a very handsome face' is not only 'Benevolent & Candid' but also 'Generous & sincere; Tho' Pious & Good, she was Religious & amiable, & Tho' Elegant & Agreeable, she was Polished & Entertaining'. These antitheses begin to affect Lady Williams's thinking – by the end of the story, each of her statements

contradicts the one before it. When her companion is invited to Bath, she declares, 'I shall be miserable without you – t'will be a most pleasant tour to you – I hope you'll go; if you do so I am sure t'will be the Death of me – ' and so on (MW, 13, 24). In some respects this is the playful manipulation of language that might be expected in the childhood writing of an author like Austen. Yet the pseudo-Johnsonian faux-antitheses which make up the character of Lady Williams suggest something more complex.

Lady Williams is the only female character in 'Jack and Alice' in whom 'every virtue met'. Just as other characters explicitly represent envy, ambition and affectation, Lady Williams literally masquerades as 'the character of Virtue'. She is also not hesitant to dispense advice: it is she who instructs Alice, 'Preserve yourself from a first Love & you need not fear a second' (MW, 13, 14, 16). As the story progresses, Lady Williams's advice becomes increasingly incomprehensible and irrelevant, if only because its intended recipients are either too drunk to listen, or dead. The juvenilia serve as a caution to those who would read tidy morality into Austen's fiction. It is telling that the only virtuous character in 'Jack and Alice' repeatedly contradicts herself and fails to give anyone a straight – or useful – answer.

As a child, Austen concerned herself more with the ethics and aesthetics of fiction than she did with representing morality in fiction. In addition to parodying Johnson's phrasing, in 'Jack and Alice' Austen also borrows from Frances Brooke's 1777 novel *The Excursion*. The phrase 'favourite sultana' appears in both Brooke's novel and Austen's story, and both works include characters who attend masquerades dressed as virtues. The name of Alice's village, Pammydiddle, evokes *The Excursion's* repeated references to Pam, knave of clubs and patron deity of card-players.<sup>4</sup> The inebriety of the eponymous Alice and her brother Jack may have been suggested by *The Excursion's* *éclaircissement*, in which the imbibing of several bottles of claret 'elevate[s]' one hero 'to the pitch of declaring his passion' for the heroine.<sup>5</sup>

By far the most important object of parody in 'Jack and Alice', however, is Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison*. Austen explicitly refers to the novel in the second chapter of 'Jack and Alice', when she mentions that Lady Williams 'like the great Sir Charles Grandison scorned to deny herself when at Home'. Sir Charles dislikes the idea of ordering his servants to lie on his behalf, but Lady Williams takes the concept further: 'She looked on that fashionable method of shutting out disagreeable Visitors', Austen writes, 'as little less than downright Bigamy' (MW, 15). Much of her parody centres on the character of Charles Adams, an obvious spoof of Sir Charles Grandison. Austen forces her Charles into situations that Richardson's hero would find intolerable, first by having him attend a masquerade, an entertainment of which Sir Charles Grandison very much disapproves. Along with this mischievous plotting, Austen also parodies the language of *Grandison* which, as

Brian Southam points out, she seems to have known by heart.<sup>6</sup> The chorus of female admirers who sing Sir Charles's praises refers to him more than once as 'dazling', a word that Austen uses in describing her Grandisonian avatar: 'Charles Adams was an amiable, accomplished & bewitching young Man; of so *dazzling* a Beauty that none but Eagles could look him in the Face' (MW, 13, my emphasis).<sup>7</sup>

Austen's parody builds upon her observation that Richardson's praise of his perfect hero recalls typical descriptions of eighteenth-century novelistic heroines. Charles Adams sees himself as 'a perfect Beauty – where would you see a finer figure or a more perfect face ... I imagine my Manners & Address to be of a most polished kind; there is a certain elegance a peculiar sweetness in them', he says (MW, 25). No other character in 'Jack and Alice' can claim to be blessed with 'sweetness'.

The young Austen delighted in overturning expectations of how women ought to behave in fiction. Alice Johnson – probably in reference to Harriet Byron's far more decorous behaviour in *Grandison* – openly declares her love for Charles Adams and, when he rejects her, turns to drink for consolation. One of the most ladylike characters is Lucy, a Welsh tailor's daughter, who has fallen in love with Charles Adams and, like Alice, suffered rejection. Lucy, rather like Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, refuses to accept Charles's rebuff, assuming that 'it might be rather the effect of his modesty than any thing else' (MW, 21). Lucy pursues Charles to Pammydiddle, transgressing another taboo of fictional feminine behaviour. In so doing, she resembles Richardson's Italian countess Olivia who, having fallen in love with Sir Charles in Italy, follows him to England where she eventually tries to stab him. In Richardson's novel, Sir Charles twists the knife from Olivia's hand, leaving a nasty, telltale bruise on her wrist. In 'Jack and Alice', the unfortunate Lucy is caught in a steel trap on Charles Adams's estate, breaking her leg. 'Cruel Charles', Alice exclaims, 'to wound the hearts & legs of all the fair' (MW, 22).

Lucy's broken leg allows Austen the opportunity to question one of Sir Charles Grandison's chauvinistic dicta on women's proper 'sphere'. Sir Charles objects to male nurses. He calls them 'unnatural creatures', claims '*There is not such a character that can be respectable*' and insists that 'women's sphere is the house, and their shining place the sick chamber'.<sup>8</sup> It is Lady Williams who is allowed to shine in 'Jack and Alice', but rather than tenderly nursing Lucy back to health, Austen has her perform the work of a surgeon: 'After examining the fracture therefore, she ... performed the operation with great skill which was the more wonderfull on account of her having never performed such a one before' (MW, 22).

Nursing is significant because of the way in which Austen revisits the topic in *Persuasion*, questioning the assumption that it is a role fit only for women. This, as we shall see, is only part of *Persuasion's* interrogation of the 'naturalness' of gender and sexual difference. When Charles Musgrove's

little boy falls out of a tree (foreshadowing his aunt's later fall from the Cobb), his father disowns responsibility, declaring that this is 'quite a female case'. The heroine Anne Elliot's opinion concurs with Sir Charles Grandison's. 'Nursing', Anne says, 'does not belong to a man, it is not his province,' adding that a 'sick child is always the mother's property, her own feelings generally make it so' (P, 55–6). As the novel's plot progresses, however, Anne's conservative view of nursing is shown to be contrary to fact, if not morally unsound. Mary Musgrove leaves her little boy in Anne's care, and Anne herself stays behind not because of her overwhelming interest in the child's welfare, but rather because of her anxiety over seeing Captain Wentworth. After the accident at Lyme, where Anne's cool judgment in a moment of crisis demonstrates her to be the most qualified person to assist Mrs Harville in nursing Louisa, Mary interferes again, this time insisting on her right to be at the centre of the action, by virtue of family attachment: 'She was so wretched, and so vehement, complained so much of injustice in being expected to go away, instead of Anne; – Anne, who was nothing to Louisa, while she was her sister, and had the best right to stay in Henrietta's stead!' (P, 115). Much as Mrs Smith's landlady provides care for her invalid lodger because she 'had a character to preserve', rather than for any altruistic reason, *Persuasion's* women nurse others not for the sake of love and feminine devotion, but for far less selfless motives (P, 155). The only truly selfless act of nursing in the novel is in fact Captain Wentworth's, when he heroically 'travelled night and day' to bring James Benwick news of his fiancée's death and comfort him. Wentworth clearly 'shines in the character of a nurse', with Captain Harville stressing to Anne that 'nobody else could have saved poor James' (P, 108).<sup>9</sup>

Nursing is only one theme connecting 'Jack and Alice' with *Persuasion*. There are further similarities in the relationships between characters. Alice, like Anne Elliot, has a self-congratulating father and a wise older friend, the widowed Lady Williams, who is bent on giving troublesome advice. The setting of the story also mimics *Persuasion's*, moving from an enclosed, fictional village (Pammydiddle/Kellynch) to the fashionable society of Bath. Most striking, however, is Austen's use of critical literary allusion in compositions separated by 30 years. Her preoccupation with literature and literariness that forms the basis of her childhood and adolescent writing not only persists but strengthens in her adult work. Of Austen's six finished novels, *Persuasion* has attracted the most critical attention for its allusive practices. It appears that this is not so much because its references to other literature are more explicit (*Mansfield Park* contains more actual quotations), but because of the kinds of literature to which it alludes. In *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* Harris argues for *Persuasion's* affinities with Chaucer's Wife of Bath's prologue and tale, as well as Shakespeare, Coleridge and Sir Charles Grandison; Peter Knox-Shaw has written convincingly on the pervading influence of Byron's Turkish Tales on the narrative,

while other critics cite allusions to Johnson, Thomson, Cowper, Scott, Wordsworth and Pope.<sup>10</sup>

Of these disparate literary references, those that have gained the most critical attention are to Byron and Scott, the only two authors whose merits are explicitly discussed by the novel's characters. The fact that Anne and Benwick proceed no further than discussing 'whether *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake* were to be preferred, and how ranked the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*; and moreover, how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced' – a discussion which does not imply particularly advanced literary analysis – has never forestalled critical excitement about the 'new' Romantic tone of Austen's 'last' novel. What is more difficult to assimilate in *Persuasion*, given what Anne calls 'the richness of the present age', is not that Byron and Scott should have a presence in the text, but that it should also demonstrate a continued preoccupation with Richardson (*P*, 100).

The final volume of *Sir Charles Grandison* was published for the first time in 1754, and by the time Austen's novels went into print it had fallen from favour. Barbauld reprints *Grandison* in *British Novelists*, but admits that 'it is a truth which cannot be denied, that the works of Richardson are not found to be so attractive to the present generation as they were to the past'.<sup>11</sup> For Austen, however, Richardson remained a subject for ongoing critical consideration. Gerard Barker makes a claim in *Grandison's Heirs* for Sir Charles Grandison's enduring influence on the construction of fictional heroes. Barker argues that *Grandison* is 'a living presence' for Austen, and that she 'was genuinely fond of Richardson's novel and valued his artistic genius', while being 'too much a realist and ironist to accept his preposterously perfect hero uncritically'.<sup>12</sup> In *Persuasion*, Austen reworks Richardson's characterisation of Sir Charles to describe William Elliot. His manners are 'exactly what they ought to be', 'polished', 'easy', 'particularly agreeable' – they are 'an immediate recommendation' (*P*, 143, 146). Beneath this polished surface are more qualities that immediately recall Richardson's *really good* man:

Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in every thing essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid ... with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life. (*P*, 146–7)

This is not the narrator's opinion, but Lady Russell's, presented through free indirect speech. It could be an exact description of the principled paragon Sir Charles Grandison, the only apparent difference being that William Elliot has not yet inherited his baronetcy. It is only appropriate that the

old-fashioned, cautious Lady Russell should base her notions of gentlemanly perfection on an outmoded ideal. Readers of 'Jack and Alice' may be amused by the widowed Lady Russell's enthusiasm for the young man, as in the earlier story it is the widowed Lady Williams who marries the 'perfect' Charles Adams at the conclusion of the tale. That Lady Russell turns to Richardson to describe a 'really good man' perhaps suits a character whose conservatism is hinted at – while Lady Russell is up to date on 'all the new poems and states of the nation that come out', her appearance is 'formal and *arrangé*', and she sits unfashionably 'upright' (P, 215). Lady Russell's conservatism alone fails to explain, however, why in *Persuasion*, with its characters who have seen action at Trafalgar, and read *Marmion* and *The Corsair*, Richardson's novel should still claim such a central place.

A clue to this apparent anachronism lies in Austen's characterisation of Benwick as 'a young man of considerable taste in reading, *though* principally in poetry' (P, 100, my emphasis). Behind that mischievous 'though' lies *Northanger Abbey's* narrator, the champion of novels and novelists, chafing at an old prejudice. Anne sets Benwick on a diet of moralists, letters and essays, but the effect of novels on a broken heart, whether harmful or therapeutic, is never discussed. This is an obtrusive silence in a novel so openly concerned with literature, and by a novelist at the height of her career. With this powerful omission, Austen questions the role of the novel, and especially its ethical role. Poetry, *Persuasion* suggests, is the appropriate medium for 'impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony', or imaging 'a mind destroyed by wretchedness', whereas moralists and memoirs (according to Anne, at least) are 'calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts' (P, 100, 101). What remains unclear is where, exactly, this leaves the novel.

In her later discussion with Captain Harville concerning women's constancy, Anne pleads 'no reference to examples in books', because 'men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands' (P, 234). It is impossible to reconcile Anne's statement with the great number of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels dramatising ridiculously, painfully faithful heroines, written by women who may have lacked formal education, but certainly had ready access to pen, paper and publishers. Superficially it appears that *Persuasion* is adopting the very 'ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers' blasted by the narrator of *Northanger Abbey*, 'of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding' (NA, 37).

It is essential to remember that the embargo on 'references to examples in books' is Anne's, and not that of a hypocritical narrator, and Anne has already revealed herself as a novel-reader by comparing herself to 'the inimitable Miss Larolles' from Burney's *Cecilia* (P, 189). Moreover Anne

Elliot – unlike, for example, Tristram Shandy – does not realise that she is in a novel. Nor is she a quixotic figure like Emma Woodhouse, who, as we have seen, is a novelist before she is a heroine. Anne is a true heroine, albeit one who is still learning romance. While Anne participates in discussions about literature, the text engages in a debate about the role of the novel that seems to occur beyond Anne's field of vision. Anne is not distracted by her Grandisonian cousin William Elliot, and the plot renders him almost irrelevant. How Anne might have felt about him 'had there been no Captain Wentworth in the case, was not worth enquiry; for there was a Captain Wentworth' (*P*, 192). When *Persuasion's* villain is of so little concern to its heroine, it seems odd that Austen would introduce him in the first place.

The reasons for her so doing seem to lie in the effect of the passage of time in the novel: not only in the eight years that separate the first and second engagements of Anne and Wentworth, but also in the 'old wonders and new improvements' of the Cobb at Lyme, in the transition from the 'old English style' at Uppercross to the new, and in the gradual reassessment of the propriety of the older generation's influence over the younger (*P*, 95, 40). This understanding of time as a palimpsest of competing, usurping and returning values rather than an orderly linear progression is a radical departure from Enlightenment theories of historical progress, a more fluid and complicated idea than previous novels – with one exception – had been able to express.

Only Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, with its narrative interruptions, disruptions and compulsive doubling-back, had ventured to depict time and memory with similar elasticity. Time as it is expressed in *Persuasion* is in some ways best understood in reference to books. While new works are published every year, they do not necessarily replace those that came before them, particularly in the reprinting, feverishly canon-making Romantic period. This is far from a conservative ideal of gradual change building on a solid foundation of tradition – at the time a popular model of British society and especially its democracy.<sup>13</sup> In Austen's schema, innovations may gradually and haphazardly effect change, but the past exerts a persistent hold on the present.

In *Persuasion*, the tenuous rapprochement always existing between the past and the present is liable at any time to the sudden rupture caused by the unexpected reappearance of what has been forgotten. Wentworth's return to Somerset is the most basic expression of this concept in the novel's plot, but Austen uses the same framework to show the ways in which the literature of the past – and just as importantly, that literature's values – can unexpectedly break in on a novel. This explains why Austen brings in William Elliot only to abruptly reveal his wickedness, in order to perform a criticism of Richardson's novel, first published more than 60 years previously. In many respects, Austen's criticism of Sir Charles Grandison in 'Jack and Alice' is less perfunctory.

As is made clear by the many conservative responses recorded in the 'Opinions' of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, Austen still struggled to counteract her readers' adherence to the moral and artistic precepts for the novel laid down by Johnson and illustrated by Richardson in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Even in her earliest writing, Austen rejects Johnson's maxim that only 'the best examples' from life 'should be exhibited' in novels, that vice, 'wherever it appears ... should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices', or that the moral be always readily identifiable, and unambiguous.<sup>15</sup> In 'Jack and Alice', to paraphrase Miss Prism, the good end murdered, and the bad end drunk – fiction *means* whatever the author likes. In *Persuasion*, the juvenilia's mischievous author is still at work, insisting in the final chapter that she has only 'bad morality to conclude with', but that it is nevertheless 'truth' (P, 248).

This is a claim Austen makes with equal force at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, and in only slightly more muted ways in her other novels. The phrase 'bad Morality' also appears in the cancelled first draft conclusion of *Persuasion* – it survived the redraft, along with references to the navy's 'National Importance', while Johnsonian phrases about the 'steadiness of Principle & the Obstinacy of Self-will ... the Darings of Heedlessness, & the Resolution of a collected Mind' were excised from the final version (P, 269, 273, 265). We can recognise in this editing the author who, in revising 'Jack and Alice', deleted the only moralising sentence that risked being interpreted seriously: that a drunken woman 'is particularly off her guard because her head is not strong enough to support intoxication' (MW, 19).

This same author, in *Persuasion*, insists on bad morality, ambiguous conclusions, and on a role for the novel beyond that of mere entertaining conduct book. Both 'Jack and Alice' and *Persuasion* demonstrate Austen's affectionate familiarity with eighteenth-century fiction and her enduring obsession with its characters, its language and, most of all, its ideological basis. They also show that she resisted these to the same extent that she deployed them for her own uses, and it was this critical practice that enabled her to find new possibilities for the novel, while laying the compulsory didacticism of the eighteenth century to rest.

What, then, is *Persuasion's* response to the Romantic movement of which – despite its ties to the eighteenth century – it is unquestioningly a part? Harris argues that the 'critique on Walter Scott' Austen thought might 'stretch out' *Pride and Prejudice* is actually performed in *Persuasion* (L, 212). She sees a dialogue taking place between the novelists, in which Scott refers to *Pride and Prejudice* in *Waverley* and *Emma* in *The Antiquary*, while Austen alludes to both the first two *Waverley* novels and the third, *Guy Mannering*, in *Persuasion*. Harris further ascribes *Persuasion's* groundedness in place and history to Scott's development of the historical novel. 'The real world', she writes, 'provides backgrounds for *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, but only in *Persuasion*, composed after Scott's first three

novels were published, does Austen write extensively of real places in times of major social alteration.<sup>16</sup> Yet the fundamental conservatism of Scott's novels is noticeably absent from *Persuasion*. It is this that lies beneath Austen's contrast of 'prudence' and 'romance', and her choice of a heroine who 'had been forced into prudence in her youth' and 'learned romance as she grew older' (*P*, 30).

Scott's novels perform the work of bringing radical Romantic concepts in line with conservative, traditionalist values. In doing so, they achieve what early gothic fiction (as described in Chapter 2) had only attempted, and what many quixote fictions also aimed at: the reconciliation of the tropes of romance and the realist impulses of the novel. In his professional shift from poet to novelist, Scott also found a means to translate those aspects of Romanticism that were attractively dangerous into a form of realism that rendered them harmless. So while Lochinvar literally carries off his lady in *Marmion* (1808), young Edward Waverley is allowed to fall in love with the beautiful, aristocratic Flora MacIvor, but marries Rose Bradwardine.<sup>17</sup> The heroines' Christian names signify that Waverley must give up his goddess (Flora) and settle on her available earthly representative (rose). Flora can be found rousing loyalist Highland troops, or beside a waterfall, playing Gaelic ballads on her harp; but Rose is a domestic creature, atypical of a young gentry lady only in her isolation from society.<sup>18</sup>

The heroines of *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* are torn, like Anne Elliot, between love and duty – but the objects of their romantic desire are ultimately shown to be prudent matches, as revelations of their true parentage reveal first Vanbeest Brown and then Lovel/Major Neville as wealthy, landed heirs to respectability. Vanbeest Brown takes the Austenian name of Bertram, while Lovel becomes Earl of Glenallan. Captain Wentworth, in contrast, has no improbable inheritance awaiting him. It is 'exertion' and 'Providence' – that is, hard work and good luck – that are to provide for him (*P*, 30). As Harris points out:

although Wentworth looks like one of Scott's courageous and sensitive romantic heroes, he is unconnected to a noble family. Being self-made, he does not aspire to take over Kellynch. In such ways, Austen critiques Scott's belief in inheritance as a redemptive power linking older and younger generations, for she imagines a society built on professionalism and comradeship rather than inherited wealth and power.<sup>19</sup>

It is Mary Musgrove that reminds us of what Anne, and *Persuasion*, have given up. 'Anne had no Uppercross-hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family; and if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from being made a baronet, she would not change situations with Anne' (*P*, 250). By this time the novel has categorically dismissed the right of baronets to

any respect derived from their title alone, and painted Mary's concerns about rank as contemptible.

More curiously, because of the way in which it seems to be such a departure for Austen, is the way in which *Persuasion* nullifies the claims of land and property. This is dramatised by Anne's shifting feelings in response to Lady Russell's hint that Anne might marry Mr Elliot:

For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of 'Lady Elliot' first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist. Lady Russell said not another word, willing to leave the matter to its own operation; and believing that, could Mr. Elliot at that moment with propriety have spoken for himself! – She believed, in short, what Anne did not believe. The same image of Mr. Elliot speaking for himself, brought Anne to composure again. The charm of Kellynch and of 'Lady Elliot' all faded away. She never could accept him. (*P*, 160)

In this passage Anne and Lady Russell are shown silently contemplating exactly the same images, and reaching opposite conclusions. Lady Russell, once again, is on the side of Burkean, Grandisonian conservatism. This is in no way presented as ridiculous in the text. After all, beside her 'prejudices on the side of ancestry' and 'value for rank', it is Lady Russell's affection for Anne, and for Anne's mother, that informs her wishes (*P*, 11). 'I own that to be able to regard you as the future mistress of Kellynch,' she tells Anne, 'the future Lady Elliot – to look forward and see you occupying your dear mother's place ... would be the highest possible gratification to me' (*P*, 159–60). Anne's reflections, however, and the language within which Austen couches them, suggest that such ideas are very dangerous indeed.

Anne's imagination is 'bewitched' by the idea of taking her mother's place – there is a 'charm' in the names Kellynch and Lady Elliot that Anne must shake off. Austen is using the word 'charm' here in its usual sense of attraction but also, as she had once before in *Mansfield Park*, in its older sense of a magic spell, one that does not have the power to lastingly 'bewitch' Anne. The very concepts most dear to Lady Russell – title, position and 'family' – are in Anne's mind bankrupt of meaning. Mary, in marrying Charles Musgrove, had 'given all the honour, and received none' in her father's, and probably her own, eyes (*P*, 6, Austen's emphasis); but Anne suffers from the feeling that she has 'no relations to bestow' on Captain Wentworth 'which a man of sense could value'. She has 'no family to receive and estimate him properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer' her husband (*P*, 251). That the daughter of a baronet can make such a statement signifies *Persuasion's* radical departure

from the older values given credence, however ironically, in Austen's earlier novels.<sup>20</sup>

This goes far beyond answering Scott's criticisms in his review of *Emma*. 'It is by no means their error to give the world or the good things of the world all for love', Scott writes of young lovers,

and before the authors of moral fiction couple Cupid indivisibly with calculating prudence, we would have them reflect, that they may sometimes lend their aid to substitute more mean, more sordid, and more selfish motives of conduct, for the romantic feelings which their predecessors perhaps fanned into too powerful a flame.<sup>21</sup>

In the early Waverley novels, however, Scott takes care to make sure that his rash, romantic heroes fit neatly (if somewhat improbably) into the most unexceptionable positions in society, as the heirs to large estates and respectable names. The 'calculating prudence' of Scott's Cupid is unassailable.<sup>22</sup> In *Persuasion*, Austen takes a different path. Whereas, by 1817, poets and intellectuals like Wordsworth and Coleridge had renounced their youthful radicalism for a conservatism that Scott also embodied, Austen chose in *Persuasion* to move beyond the ironic, cynical criticism of her society's values with which she had previously been content. Anne eagerly abandons her family of origin to make a new family of chosen friends, and even Kellynch is handed over without regret: Anne 'could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners' (*P*, 125). This is the antithesis of the plots repeatedly employed by Scott, in which unworthy usurpers are ejected from land they have falsely claimed by the revelation of the true heirs. Scott takes this trope from early romances, where heroes are often princes in disguise, seeking to claim their rightful inheritance through combat. Scott's heroes usually avoid war, relying on documentary evidence and testimony to ensure their legal claims are upheld.

The law, as understood in *Persuasion*, is no miraculous tool for justice. Sir Walter has been able to balk his creditors, apparently for years, accruing massive debts. Mrs Smith, in contrast, has been unable to access the money from her husband's estate, because of Mr Elliot's refusal to act as Executor. Her relationship to the historic Charlotte Smith, whose legal difficulties were notorious, would have been clear to Austen's first readers.<sup>23</sup> English law and the family – together forming the bedrock of society in the view of conservative thinkers – offer no substantial, reliable ties in *Persuasion*. 'Daughters are never of so much consequence to a father,' claims Lady Catherine de Burgh (*PP*, 211), and for Anne Elliot, who is 'nobody' at home, and whose father has 'no affection' for her, *Persuasion* seems to bear out this comment (*P*, 5, 249).

Unifying these themes, *Persuasion* asks its readers to make value judgments on different grounds than those of 'place', a word which has several interconnected meanings for Austen. She demonstrates the ways in which personal status is dependant on geography: while Anne is 'nobody' at Kellynch, she is in great demand at Uppercross, recognising that 'a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea' (P, 42). Anne's movements mirror, in a radically domesticated fashion, the voyages of Gulliver or the *Endeavour*, where villages and towns stand in for the islands of the imagined or real Pacific, each to be explored and their inhabitants' societies understood in turn. Anne is sometimes tolerant of these differences between communities: 'She acknowledged it to be very fitting, that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse' (P, 43). Yet later in the novel, she objects to her family's currying favour with their aristocratic relations:

'I confess it does vex me, that we should be so solicitous to have the relationship acknowledged, which we may be very sure is a matter of perfect indifference to them.'

'Pardon me, my dear cousin, you are unjust to your own claims. In London, perhaps, in your present quiet style of living, it might be as you say; but in Bath, Sir Walter Elliot and his family will always be worth knowing, always acceptable as acquaintance.'

'Well,' said Anne, 'I certainly am proud, too proud to enjoy a welcome which depends so entirely upon place.' (P, 151)

What Anne seeks, and ultimately seems to find in Captain Wentworth and his naval comrades, is a system of value that is universal, rather than contingent. 'Place' – in terms of either geography or social status – is irrelevant to the new world Anne chooses.

In Austen's earlier novels, she had taken care to have her heroines (and through them, her readers) visit and approve the houses that were to become their homes on marriage. Viewings of Pemberley, Woodston and Donwell Abbey form important scenes in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, respectively. Where an estate remains unseen, as with Colonel Brandon's Delaford, known to the reader only by a rather sinister description, the reader's satisfaction in the heroine's marriage is deliberately alloyed. This is not, however, Austen's intention in *Persuasion*. Anne finishes the novel, not as the lady of the house, but as 'mistress of a very pretty landaulette', a fashionable carriage (P, 250). For the naval officers, as Harris writes, it is 'their characters, not their quarters, [that] give them consequence'.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, like Mrs Croft, Anne will join her husband aboard ship – indeed, that is the image presented by one film adaptation of the novel.<sup>25</sup> Anne enters, as Nina Auerbach has argued, a brave new world, one

whose values are themselves yet to be discovered. In *Persuasion*, Austen demonstrates the process by which such values – values that may be summed up in the phrase ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ – may be fairly determined.

\* \* \* \* \*

But is it true that duty prescribes the same rule to every temperament? Are not great thoughts and generous feelings the debt owed to this world by the beings able to discharge it? Ought not every woman, like every man, to make a way for herself according to her nature and talents?

– Germaine de Staël<sup>26</sup>

women are hard-liv’d to a proverb.

– John Cleland<sup>27</sup>

*Persuasion*, more explicitly than any other of Austen’s works, grapples with concepts that today may confidently be labelled feminist. Throughout the novel, Austen raises the issue of sexual difference: in nursing, as we have seen, and in Captain Wentworth’s debate with his sister over the propriety of having women aboard ship. It is during Anne’s conversation with Captain Harville at the White Hart, however, that the novel’s concerns are crystallised. Anne is not the first to claim that women’s feelings endure longer than men’s:

‘It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions.’ (*P*, 232)

Similar sentiments are expressed (albeit in far more melodramatic language) by the absurdly long-suffering heroine of *The Recess*:

Ah man, happy man! how superior are you in the indulgence of nature! blest with scientific resources, with boldness, and an activity unknown to more persecuted woman; from your various disappointments in life ever spring forth some vigorous and blooming hope, insensibly staunching those wounds in the heart through which the vital powers of the feebler sex bleed helplessly away. (*Recess*, 3: 28)

But it is Barbauld's comments in *British Novelists* that compensate for Anne's embargo on 'references in books'. Barbauld writes,

Why is it that women when they write are apt to give a melancholy tinge to their compositions? Is it that they suffer more, and have fewer resources against melancholy? Is it that men, mixing at large in society, have a brisker flow of ideas, and, seeing a greater variety of characters, introduce more of the business and pleasures of life into their productions? Is it that humour is a scarcer product of the mind than sentiment, and more congenial to the stronger powers of man? Is it that women nurse those feelings in secrecy and silence and diversify the expression of them with endless shades of sentiment, which are more transiently felt, and with fewer moderations of delicacy, by the other sex?<sup>28</sup>

Barbauld's attempt to account for what she sees as a gendered difference in the novel touches on many of the points made by Anne in her debate with Harville. For the most part Barbauld's ideas concur with Anne's claim that, because women 'live at home', their thoughts 'prey on' them, whereas men's occupations and freedom in society allow what Barbauld calls a 'brisker flow' of ideas to, as Anne says, 'soon weaken impressions'. Only in her suggestion that humour is 'more congenial to the stronger powers of man' does Barbauld suggest a kind of biological basis for her argument, but couched as it is in a series of questions, it is easier to read this passage of Barbauld's as a genuine query, rather than an exhaustive list of potential explanations for her initial observation. It would appear that Austen has her heroine draw on Barbauld's ideas to explain a perceived difference in the effect of similar emotions on men and women, and by her disclaimer 'no references to books' seems to wholly exclude literature from her discussion with Captain Harville. The fact of Anne's *being* in a novel, however, demands the reader's attention, just as *Persuasion's* relationship with a novel published ten years previously demands a consideration of its focus on gender and art.

*Persuasion* engages with Germaine de Staël's 1807 novel *Corinne, or Italy* so intensively as to suggest that Austen saw her own novel as in dialogue with Staël's, and in particular with the French author's meditations on the nature of inequality between men and women, and the consequences for women – particularly for women artists – of unequal duties, and unequal treatment. It is possible that Austen took her original title for *Persuasion*, 'The Elliots', from Staël's own notes to her novel, in which she provides the historical basis for the scene in which the hero rescues a burning town. 'Mr Elliot, envoy of England, saved the life of an old man at Naples in the same way as Lord Nelvil.'<sup>29</sup> Staël also includes a lengthy passage praising the English navy as members of a 'military monastery' who 'show unusual compassion for women and children when there are any on board'. Louisa Musgrove's

fall from the Cobb at Lyme may well have had its origins in a similar incident in *Corinne*, in which the hero Oswald, attempting to rescue a drowning man, is nearly drowned himself. The eponymous heroine of Staël's novel demonstrates great presence of mind:

'He is alive,' she cried. 'He is alive!' And at that moment she recovered a strength and courage barely possessed by those who were merely Oswald's friends. She called for all possible assistance. She herself was able to help. She supported the fainting Oswald's head. She covered it with her tears and, in spite of the cruellest emotion, she forgot nothing; she did not lose a moment and her attentions were not distracted by her distress.

Corinne is a gifted poet, musician and actress, lauded almost to the point of worship in Italy, but treated as deeply suspect and even dangerous in her father's homeland, England. Her aristocratic Scottish lover is alternately attracted and repulsed by her talent, and her willingness to display that talent in public. As mentioned above in Chapter 4, Oswald 'would have liked Corinne to be as shy and reserved as an Englishwoman and to reveal her eloquence and genius to him alone'. 'However distinguished a man may be', Staël explains, 'he never appreciates the superiority of a woman without mixed feelings. If he loves her, his heart is troubled; if he does not love her, his pride is offended.' Corinne's younger, English half-sister unknowingly becomes her rival, as Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove draw the attention of Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*. Corinne is driven almost to despair when she acknowledges her sister's attractions. 'Perhaps he no longer needs to find a superior mind and a passionate heart in women?' she thinks,

'What attracts him now is the remarkable beauty of a sixteen-year-old, the angelic expression of that age, the shy, virgin heart which devotes the first feelings she has ever experienced to the man of her choice.'

Corinne's imagination was so impressed by her sister's advantages that she was almost ashamed to fight against such charms. It seemed to her that even talent was a ruse, wit a tyranny, and passionate love a violence beside this unarmed innocence, and although Corinne was not yet twenty-eight, she already foresaw that period in her life when, with so much pain, women mistrust their ability to be attractive.<sup>30</sup>

Anne Elliot, in contrast, is able to recognise the Musgrove sisters' attractive qualities without feeling a need to apologise for her own abilities. Although Anne thinks them 'some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance', she is 'saved as we all are by some comfortable feeling of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange' and 'would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments' (*P*, 41).

While Corinne, in stark contrast to Anne, is accustomed to being the centre of public attention, Staël's heroine lacks Anne's confidence in her own worth and more unobtrusive talents:

She played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of ... She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation. (*P*, 46–7)

The contrast between Anne's unassuming, unobtrusive performance and Corinne's numerous, very public artistic triumphs seems to imply a conservative response on Austen's part to Staël's challenging questions about the proper role of the woman artist. If Anne can be content merely to enjoy her own performance, without expectation of praise from her inattentive audience, then surely she is a successful model of a talented woman – one whose performances sacrifice neither pleasure nor modesty. Corinne, on the other hand, a woman who is 'too remarkable in every way', finds life in England and the restrictions placed on her as a woman wholly at odds with her needs and ambitions as an artist. She writes, 'it seems to me that I could have sent a delicately improved mechanical doll in my place. It would have fulfilled my function in society very well ... women's lives, in the isolated corner of the earth where I was living, were very dull.' This dullness, moreover, threatens to strip Corinne of her individuality and artistic gifts:

I had already spent four extremely tedious years in this way, but what distressed me even more, I felt my talent slipping away. In spite of myself, my mind was occupied with petty things, for in a society lacking all interest in science, literature, pictures, and music – in which, in short, no one is interested in the imagination – it is the little things, the minute criticisms, which of necessity form the subject of conversations. Moreover, minds which are not active or thoughtful have something narrow, touchy, and constrained about them which makes social relationships both painful and insipid.<sup>31</sup>

In the years since her broken engagement, Anne has 'faded', and taken on many of the tasks of the old maid, or spinster aunt. While at times this is presented as merely a genteel withdrawing from the role of young lady, Austen's use of free indirect speech – indeed, the unprecedented facility with which she manipulates her habitual narrative technique in *Persuasion* – allows her to suggest in Anne the unsettling ideas raised in *Corinne*. Neglected talent, Staël argues, does not simply lie dormant, but withers away, or else festers with unexpressed resentment. Through *Persuasion's* insistence on an

occasional jarring comment, Austen hints that Anne's mind is at risk of narrowing, and susceptible to the taints of bitterness.

When Mrs Musgrove is reminded of her dead son, the narrative takes on a disturbingly callous tone, one that the reader is eager to attribute not to Anne, but to a narrator bordering on viciousness. The 'Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome, hopeless son; and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year,' and this young man, once under Wentworth's command and now dead at 19, is branded 'thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable' (*P*, 50, 51). Anne's preoccupation with her own feelings in the presence of the grieving parents, however, forces the reader to reconsider these statements. 'To hear them talking so much of Captain Wentworth ... was a new sort of trial to Anne's nerves' – it is Anne's nerves, not the Musgroves', with which the reader is expected to sympathise (*P*, 52). The easy dismissal of a mother's grief is repeated again soon afterwards:

They were actually on the same sofa, for Mrs. Musgrove had most readily made room for him; – they were divided only by Mrs. Musgrove. It was no insignificant barrier indeed. Mrs. Musgrove was of a comfortable substantial size, infinitely more fitted by nature to express good cheer and good humour, than tenderness and sentiment; and while the agitations of Anne's slender form, and pensive face, may be considered as very completely screened, Captain Wentworth should be allowed some credit for the self-command with which he attended to her large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for.

Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain, – which taste cannot tolerate, – which ridicule will seize. (*P*, 68)

Are these the thoughts of an omniscient narrator, or of Sir Walter Elliot's daughter? The free indirect speech seems to pose only uncomfortable questions. Attributing these harsh sentiments to an abstracted narrative voice, or to Anne, is equally unappealing. They go beyond cynicism to simple brutality. Wentworth is praised for his 'consideration for all that was real and unabsurd in the parent's feelings', but nevertheless the claim that such feelings are 'absurd' is repeated (*P*, 68).

As Julia Giordano suggests of *Persuasion*, 'the distance between narrator and heroine may be wider than it first appears'.<sup>32</sup> Hints in the text suggest that this is, in fact, Anne's opinion – conveyed by the most sophisticated narrative technique yet developed. Anne believes she can access Wentworth's thoughts, and read the most 'momentary expression' of

his face, even those 'too transient ... to be detected by any who understood him less than herself' (*P*, 67). Because the narrative is so intimately entwined with Anne's consciousness, however, readers lack the necessary distance to assess if Anne's assumptions are correct or not. Those passages where Anne's sensory and cognitive shortcomings are clear are, in fact, those that most impress the reader. Maria Edgeworth, one of *Persuasion's* earliest readers, was most likely the first to recognise the importance of Austen's achievement in these passages. She wrote to her aunt, 'don't you see Captain Wentworth, or rather don't you in her place feel him taking the boisterous child off her back as she kneels by the sick boy on the sofa? And is not the first meeting after their long separation admirably well done?'<sup>33</sup> In scenes like these, readers can easily recognise that their perceptions are filtered through those of Anne. The effect of the disjointed syntax recording Anne's first encounter with Wentworth is to suggest it springs from Anne's overwhelmed senses. 'Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtsy passed; she heard his voice – he talked to Mary, said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing: the room seemed full – full of persons and voices' (*P*, 59). Scenes involving a more composed Anne are, as we have seen, more difficult to parse.

We can turn to *Corinne*, and Austen's interest in its exploration of feminist issues, for assistance. *Persuasion* is an experimental novel, made all the more so by its heroine. Anne at first glance seems to be a very different creature from the confident, famous Corinne, sharing little but her age (both heroines are 27 years old when their novels begin). Yet both authors use their heroines to the same ends – to demonstrate the gendered nature of experience. 'How fortunate men are to go to war,' cries Corinne, 'to risk their lives, to give themselves up to the passion for honour and danger! But there is nothing outside themselves which relieves women. Their lives, unchanging in the presence of misfortune, are a very long torture.' 'We cannot help ourselves,' says Anne. 'We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us' (*P*, 232). Through Anne, Austen demonstrates the way in which experience may contract and embitter an individual's mind. Corinne explains that her behaviour would draw no criticism if 'society did not fetter women with a thousand bonds from which men are free', while Anne recognises that the eight years that had 'destroyed her youth and bloom had only given [Wentworth] a more glowing, manly, open look' (*P*, 61).<sup>34</sup> If *Persuasion* has a moral beyond its mischievous author's 'bad morality', it is that the tragic injustice in the different destinies of men and women is not natural, or inevitable (*P*, 248). Within a few short weeks of being treated as an equal, freed from the crushing coldness of her family circle, Anne regains her bloom, and her charitable disposition. It is almost enough to suggest that all individuals might one day succeed in such intellectual and emotional freedom and happiness; it

is 'almost enough to spread purification and perfume' over the hardness and injustice of reality (*P*, 192).

\* \* \* \* \*

'When once we are buried you think we are dead  
But behold me Immortal'

(*MW*, 452)

The subject matter of 'Winchester Races', a deliberately silly poem dealing with pagan traditions, a comically vengeful Anglo-Saxon saint, and Regency horse-racing, is clearly at odds with any idealised image of Austen as the maiden aunt sinking with quiet propriety into the grave, her thoughts fixed on a genteel Anglican afterlife. It refuses to fit into any comfortable narrative of the great novelist's artistic maturity and physical decline, and has been long neglected by critics. Austen's *métier* is the novel, and 'Winchester Races', like almost all the rest of her surviving verses, is demonstrably a playful, even flippant excursion into a literary medium Austen never seriously attempted.<sup>35</sup>

It is easy to dismiss 'Winchester Races' as pure nonsense – or even as the pointless ramblings of a woman just days from death – but even a brief analysis of the poem reveals its treatment of some of Austen's career-long preoccupations (*L*, 360–1). The most obvious of these is Austen's ongoing interest in current affairs. The occasion of the poem was her learning from one of her attendants, as she lay on her sickbed in Winchester, that a local horse-racing meet had been postponed due to wet weather. While this would have been significant to the gentry and nobility who had travelled to Winchester to attend the derby, it is difficult to imagine Austen feeling much sympathy for them. Even in good health, her contempt for such activities is apparent. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham often leaves Lydia at home while he attends races, and in *Mansfield Park* Tom Bertram contracts his dangerous illness as a consequence of falling into a gutter outside a tavern near a race track. The poem's image of the spectators – the 'Lords & the Ladies' all 'sattin'd & ermin'd' – serves as a reminder of Austen's habitually irreverent responses to fashionable or aristocratic pretension, and illustrates her disdain for the competitive displays of extravagance that characterised the social behaviour of the wealthiest classes.

The notion of St Swithun addressing these Regency lords, ladies and gentlemen from the roof of his desolate shrine is redolent of the absurd touches that abound in Austen's juvenilia. In the masquerade scene from 'Jack and Alice', for instance, 'a little fat woman representing Envy' perches 'alternately on the foreheads' of three other characters playing cards. In 'Henry and Eliza' a young and friendless heroine builds a Man of War to cross the English Channel, and afterwards 'raise[s] an army' to fight her

enemy (*MW*, 14, 39). In fact, this often-neglected poem enacts, with comic effect, the kinds of literary practice that Austen had experimented with throughout her career. What results is a peculiarly Austenian version of the return of the repressed – the ‘repressed’ in this case being literary allusion. In her finished novels Austen interweaves references to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Samuel Richardson and Walter Scott, in such a way as to lead many readers to overlook them altogether, and to keep the rest puzzling over them in frustration and bewilderment. In ‘Winchester Races’, St Swithun (patron of Winchester and of the ancient pilgrimage route running through Austen’s home village of Chawton), utterly neglected by a self-centred and ignorant gentry society, literally rises up out of his tomb to chastise those who – if they ever thought of him at all – would dismiss him as a mere superstitious legend.<sup>36</sup>

The title ‘Venta’, which was bestowed on the verses by R. W. Chapman, is taken from the poem’s reference to the Roman name for the settlement at modern-day Winchester. Its use by Austen could be interpreted as a leftover from eighteenth-century Augustan classicism, but she generally avoids peppering her writing with classical references, and like Marianne Dashwood, ‘admir[es] Pope no more than is proper’ (*SS*, 47). It is more probable that Austen uses the Latin name in order to emphasise her sense of Winchester as a very old, long-inhabited place with Roman, Briton and Anglo-Saxon traditions that, however much they may be forgotten by her contemporaries, still have some continuity with, and even hold on, the present. It is difficult not to read ‘Winchester Races’ as a courageous, though irreverent, assertion of artistic independence in the face of death, a last declaration of individual will – ‘behold me Immortal!’<sup>37</sup> It is in no sense, however, a major work of the stature of Austen’s six completed novels, and while it is certainly a curiosity, it offers no room for the kind of speculation inspired by what Austen’s family called ‘The Last Work’, the novel fragment now known as *Sanditon*.

*Sanditon*’s 12 surviving chapters begin the history of a ‘young & rising Bathing-place’, which a couple of its entrepreneurial gentry are attempting, with mixed results, to develop from a quiet fishing village (*MW*, 368). The novel opens with Mr Parker, amateur property developer and general enthusiast, directing his carriage up a treacherously sandy hill. The road is so poor that it baffles the horses, and in the ensuing accident Mr Parker sprains an ankle. Of all the carriage-crashes in novels of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (such episodes appear in Burney’s *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, are central to the plot of Bage’s *Hermesprong* and constitute the opening of Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian*) this is by far the least spectacular. Compared with Edward and Augustus from Austen’s ‘Love and Freindship’ – whom we last encounter ‘weltering in their blood’ – Mr Parker’s sprained ankle is embarrassingly trivial (*MW*, 99). It allows Mr Parker and his wife, however, the opportunity of befriending the young Charlotte Heywood. It appears

that Charlotte is to be the heroine of the novel – she is, at least, the heroine of the surviving fragment.

Charlotte travels to Sanditon with the Parkers, and once there she provides the channel through which flows Austen's free indirect narration. Charlotte quickly learns that she is surrounded by a group of people so hampered by self-delusion that, despite their good intentions, they are invariably untrustworthy narrators. In this she resembles a sophisticated version of the heroine of *Catharine, or the Bower*, without any of Kitty's naïveté. It is only by developing her own, somewhat suspicious attitude, that Charlotte is able to sift a few truths from all the idle boasting and advertising puffery with which she is surrounded. This aspect of *Sanditon's* construction gives it the potential to have become a radically modern work, one preoccupied with the nature of reality itself, and the labyrinthine epistemological work required by the rapacious, shifting fictions of high capitalism. The manuscript is too short and slight, however, to provide fuel for anything more than mere critical conjecture.

As Linda Bree has pointed out, 12 chapters into *Emma*, Mr Elton is yet to propose, and Frank Churchill has failed to arrive in Highbury.<sup>38</sup> Given Austen's known propensity for reworking her novels over and over, it seems pointless to speculate about what *Sanditon* the novel might have become. What does survive in the fragment, however, is curious. The few critics who have seriously addressed *Sanditon* tend to note two clear themes. The first is hypochondria, unanimously seen as a courageous choice for a dying writer. The second is the collision between an old society based around fishing and agriculture and a new economy built on a fledgling tourism industry. Sanditon is, of course, the town built upon the sand, a reference to Matthew 7:26, in which unbelievers are 'likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand'. The biblical chapter begins 'Judge not, that ye be not judged', and it is the judgment of *Sanditon's* characters that is most at question in the fragment. The treacherous 'half rock, half sand' of Charlotte's native Willingden quickly gives way to the seaside proto-resort of Sanditon, whose shifting sands seem to destabilise each of the character's perceptions (MW, 364). As E. M. Forster recognised, 'Sanditon is not like Lyme or Highbury or Northanger or other places that provide scenes or titles to past novels. It exists in and of itself ... Sanditon gives out an atmosphere, and also exists as a geographic and economic force.'<sup>39</sup>

In *Persuasion*, which Austen chose to set just prior to the battle of Trafalgar, and to fill with naval characters and imagery, the sea is conceived of as a realm of individual daring, egalitarian comradeship, and the possibility of a fresh start for a corrupted, vitiated gentry society. In *Sanditon*, far from idly enjoying their exalted social status and endless leisure, the gentry have taken on the roles of speculating entrepreneurs. They tout for profit that land of which, in conservative Georgian discourse, they are supposed to act as benevolent custodians. On the edge

of the sea in *Sanditon*, however, stability, whether of character, class or narrative, is impossible.

Whereas Emma Woodhouse takes two-thirds of a novel to recognise Frank Churchill's duplicitous trickery, Charlotte Heywood has only one conversation with Sir Edward Denham, *Sanditon's* would-be local rake, before she thinks him 'downright silly. – His chusing to walk with her, she had learnt to understand. It was done to pique Miss Brereton,' the true object of this self-consciously derivative villain's affections. Charlotte decides that Sir Edward has 'not a very clear Brain ... & talked a good deal by rote' (MW, 398). The fact that Sir Edward is so readily dismissed as a threat to Charlotte's peace of mind suggests that Austen had planned different obstacles for Charlotte to face than the usual novelist's stock-in-trade of handsome rakes, scheming rivals and poverty.

What these new challenges might have been, however, it is fruitless to guess. Speculating about how distinctive a change in Austen's style this work might have become, had it continued, is also a rather futile endeavour. In *The Common Reader* Virginia Woolf claimed a noticeably developing artistic style for *Persuasion*, arguing that it was, in effect, an only partly successful transitional phase in Austen's career, and lamenting that her early death prematurely halted this novelistic metamorphosis.<sup>40</sup> Yet what little is clear in *Sanditon* is Austen's unstinting preoccupation with the impact of fiction on her character's thought processes:

Charlotte could see in her only the most perfect representation of whatever Heroine might be most beautiful & bewitching, in all the numerous vol:<sup>s</sup> they had left behind them on M<sup>rs</sup> Whitby's shelves. – Perhaps it might be partly owing to her having just issued from a Circulating Library – but she c<sup>d</sup> not separate the idea of a complete Heroine from Clara Brereton. Her situation with Lady Denham so very much in favour of it! – She seemed placed with her on purpose to be ill-used. Such Poverty & Dependance joined to such Beauty & Merit, seemed to leave no choice in the business. – These feelings were not the result of any spirit of Romance in Charlotte herself. No, she was a very sober-minded young Lady, sufficiently well-read in Novels to supply her Imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them; & while she pleased herself the first 5 minutes with fancying the Persecutions which *ought* to be the Lot of the interesting Clara, especially in the form of the most barbarous conduct on Lady Denham's side, she found no reluctance to admit from subsequent observation, that they appeared to be on very comfortable Terms. (MW, 391–2)

This passage, like many in *Sanditon*, seems to close off potential avenues of interpretation almost as soon as they are opened. It forestalls all criticism and judgment – both by Charlotte and by its readers. What is a reader to

do with a 'sober-minded' heroine, especially one 'not at all unreasonably influenced' by novels? It also seems strange that Austen would ask us to trust this as a description of Charlotte, who is herself a fictional character, and one who has only just 'issued' from a circulating library, like any other battered volume of sentimental literature. It is likewise unclear, to borrow from the title of Anna Austen's abandoned novel, which is the heroine (*L*, 279). Candidates include the 'sober-minded' Charlotte, recalling Werther's Charlotte; the 'interesting' Clara (a name shared by one heroine in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*); and even the boarding-school misses who arrive at Sanditon before the fragment breaks off. It seems possible that there may be space, in this incomplete, seemingly unstructured novel, for both a real heroine and a 'complete' heroine, as Charlotte calls Clara.

The fragment of *Sanditon* is in many ways a deeply, and perhaps even an intentionally, disappointing text. It frustrates even attentive readers by consistently pre-empting any attempt at critical analysis. This is also its greatest charm, and its most solid claim to the status of Austen's last work. Grave illness, the heavy narcotics that formed the basis of eighteenth-century medical treatment and the author's growing expectation of her early death must have had an impact on *Sanditon*, although the nature of that impact is now unknowable.

## Appendix: What Happened to Jane Austen's Books?

Biographers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries inevitably touch on one of the few known facts of Austen's life – the sale of 'her' books (books actually owned by her father) prior to the family's removal to Bath in 1801, when Austen was 25 years old.<sup>1</sup> The newspaper advertisement offering the books and other household effects for auction is displayed at Austen's cottage in Chawton, and in his *Bibliography of Jane Austen* David Gilson lists these volumes, including those that survive in libraries and in private collections.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the records of this sale, however, Gilson and other researchers have recourse only to the occasional mention of books in Austen's letters for her purchases after 1801. However genteelly poor the all-female Austen household was, some book buying would not have been unreasonable, and we know Austen occasionally gave books as gifts. As H. J. Jackson writes, 'new books were luxuries but not out-of-reach luxuries'.<sup>3</sup> It seems improbable that an author – and, moreover, such a keen reader – would have limited her reading to the selections available from circulating libraries, however well stocked, or to borrowing from family members, however generous. Although, so far, only one or two explicit records have been found of Austen's book purchases *in propria persona*, I believe that Austen – like any literary middle-class woman of the period – is likely to have bought a few books during her lifetime, especially after her move to Chawton and the success of her early publications provided her with some domestic and financial security.<sup>4</sup>

Positing such a collection of volumes, it remains to determine which novels Austen may have bought for herself (we know she purchased books as gifts<sup>5</sup>), and what became of them after her death. In this appendix I suggest that such a collection did exist, and that it was eventually sent to Austen's brother Edward Knight's estate at Godmersham Park, where it maintained a degree of separateness from the larger Godmersham library.

In 1818, the year following Austen's death, Edward commissioned a catalogue of his library at Godmersham, both volumes of which are now in the possession of Chawton House Library. The manuscript catalogue was added to, clearly some years later and in a different, unprofessional hand, to include subsequent additions to the library. The final page of the catalogue, as well as some loose leaves inside one of its volumes, list the contents of the 'South Case'. These entries, judging from the publication dates of books they include, appear to have been made after 1835. It seems likely, therefore, that the contents of the south case arrived at Godmersham after the original catalogue was made in 1818.

The books named as belonging to the south case include a full set of Austen's own novels, along with a number of contemporary novels and volumes of poetry that the evidence of Austen's letters and novels suggests she had read. These include many of the texts referred to in preceding chapters: Mary Brunton's *Self Control*, Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion*, Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* and Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage*. Also listed is *Canterbury Tales* (most likely the 1804 work of that name by Sophia Lee, author of *The Recess*, and her sister Harriet) and an 1810 edition of the novel reputed to be Austen's favourite, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles*

*Grandison*. Figures 2 and 3 are photographs of the manuscript catalogue entries for the south case at Godmersham and the loose leaves found within the catalogue's pages (each accompanied by a transcription), taken with the permission of Chawton House Librarian Jacqui Grainger.

**Transcription of the final page of the MS Library Catalogue of Godmersham Park, now part of the Knight Collection at Chawton House Library (Figure 2)**

*South Case*

Oct	Specimens of the British Poets	7 vols shelf 1	London	1819
	<b>Self Control</b>	3 vols	1	Edinburgh 1811
	<b>Marmion</b>	2 vols	5	_____ 1810
	<b>Canterbury Tales</b>	5 vols	2	London 1804
	<b>Lady of the Lake</b>		2	Edinburgh 1810
Removed to				
Drawing Room	<b>Patronage</b>	4 vols	3	London 1814
	<b>History of Sir C. Grandison</b>	7 vols	3	London 1810
	<b>The Looker On</b>	4 vols	6	London 1795
	<i>Lyell's Principles of Geology</i>	4 vols	4	London 1835
Removed to				
Drawing Room	Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life	6 vols	4	London 1818
	<i>Curiosities of Literature</i>	5 vols	4	London 1823
Ditto	Northanger Abbey & Persuasion	4 vols	5	London 1818
	<b>The Wanderer</b>	5 vols	5	London 1814
Draw'g room	<b>Roderick</b>	2 vols	5	London 1815
Ditto	<b>Sense and Sensibility</b>	3 vols	6	London 1811
Ditto	<b>Pride and Prejudice</b>	3 vols	6	_____ 1813
Ditto	<b>Mansfield Park</b>	3 vols	6	_____ 1814
Ditto	<b>Emma</b>	3 vols	6	_____ 1816
	<b>Thinks I to myself</b>	2 vols	6	_____ 1812

*Notes*

Titles in bold indicate volumes possibly owned by Jane and Cassandra Austen. Italicised titles indicate later additions to the manuscript, added interlineally. Volumes published after Jane Austen's death, including *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life* and *Specimens of the British Poets* may have been those in Cassandra's possession.

*The Looker On* was a periodical published by the pseudonymous Reverend Olive-Branch; *Canterbury Tales* is most likely not Chaucer's, but Harriet and Sophia Lee's 1804 work of that name; *Roderick* is probably Robert Southey's *Roderick the Goth*, but there is also an 1815 edition of Smollett's *Roderick Random*, and Scott's *Don Roderick* is a possibility; *Thinks I to Myself* is a Shandean pastiche by Edward Nares.

Tit.		1 <sup>st</sup> Slip. Shelf	Loc.
<i>Specimens of the British Poets.</i>	7 vols.	1	London 1819
<i>Self Control.</i>	3 vols.	1	Edinburgh. 1811
<i>Marmion.</i>	2 vols.	5	----- 1810
<i>Canterbury Tales.</i>	5 vols.	2	London 1814
<i>Lady of the Lake.</i>		2	Edinburgh. 1810
<i>Reassigned to the Drawing room. Petrarch</i>	4 vols.	3	London 1814
<i>History of St C. Grandiosa.</i>	7 vols.	3	London 1810
<i>The Doctress Dr.</i>	4 vols.	6	London 1798
<i>Lyell's Principles of Geology</i>	4 vols.		
<i>removed to the Drawing room. Stewart's &amp;c</i>	4 vols.		

Figure 2 Godmersham Library Catalogue (1818), n.p. South Case books: *Specimens of the British Poets* – *Lyell's Principles of Geology*

### Transcription of loose sheet found inside Godmersham Library Catalogue (Figure 3)

1853. January 14.

Books belonging to the Library Catalogue, now in the Drawing room.

Miss Edgeworth's Patronage. taken from South Case. Slip 1. Shelf 9.  
 Miss Edgeworth's tales of fashionable life 6 vols. – 4th shelf  
 Northanger Abbey, Persuasion. 5th shelf  
 Sense & Sensibility, Pride & Prejudice,  
 Mansfield Park, Emma – 6th shelf

Holy Bible 2 vols. taken from West Case.  
 Slip 1. Shelf 2  
 Common Prayer from the same.

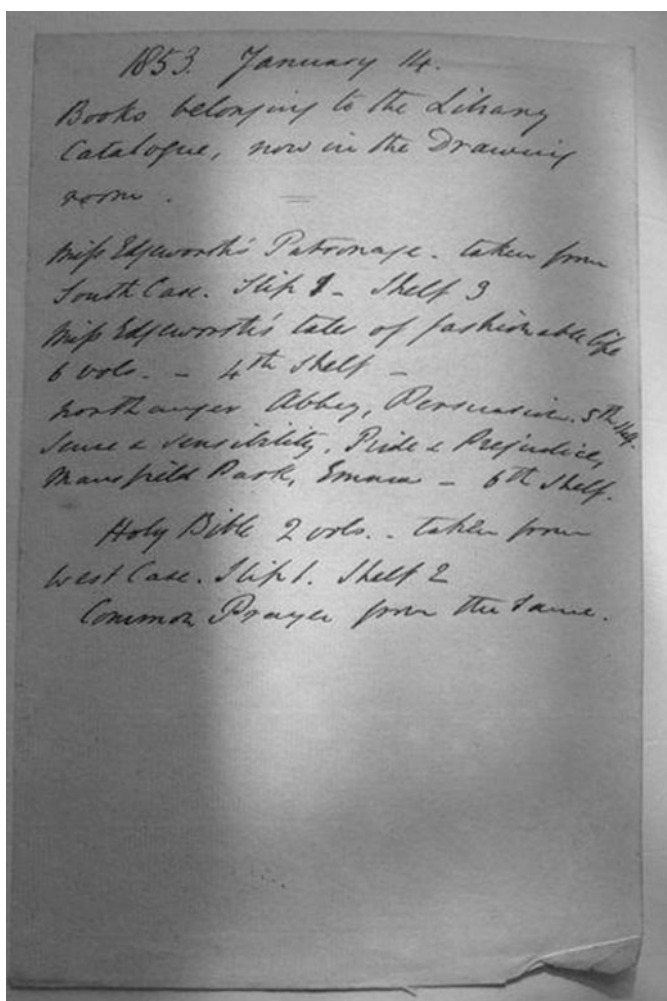


Figure 3 Loose sheet, found within Godmersham Library Catalogue (1818), n.p.

In accordance with her will, Jane Austen's small estate, with a few exceptions, passed to her sister Cassandra (see *L*, 355). Before her own death, Cassandra undertook her now infamous organisation of her sister's letters, during which she destroyed some, and bequeathed the remainder to various friends and relatives. I have found no record of Cassandra willing any of her own or her sister's books to any family members – her will only records her financial bequests. Cassandra's will was executed by her younger brother Charles, and his daughter (Cassandra's goddaughter) Cassandra Esten Austen. The latter inherited from her godmother the interest on a parcel of land worth six pounds eight shillings per annum, property that had been left to Jane and Cassandra

by Cassandra's godmother, Elizabeth Leigh: property thus passed through three generations of unmarried women.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this property, by assisting with the execution of Cassandra's will, Cassandra Esten, as Le Faye writes, 'became possessed of memorabilia of Jane Austen which Cassandra had always preserved' (L, 488). Pat Rogers guesses that this may have included a first edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, now held by the Harry Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas, that has Cassandra's signature on its title page. Rogers further suggests that Cassandra Esten gave the book to her brother's wife, Emma Austen (née de Blois), who in turn passed it to Emma Austen-Leigh, the wife of James Edward Austen-Leigh, author of the *Memoir*.<sup>7</sup> It is far from clear, however, that Cassandra Esten kept the rest of the Chawton cottage books.

The unusual contents of Godmersham library's south case suggest that Cassandra Esten may have sent those books once owned by Jane and Cassandra Austen at Chawton to Godmersham Park to join the largest collection of books owned by the Austen and Austen-Knight families. Equally possible, as Kathryn Sutherland has suggested, is that Cassandra Austen, before her death, sent these books to her niece Fanny Knight at Godmersham along with some of Jane Austen's letters. Too little documentary evidence survives, however, to establish proof. The strange position of the south case books within the context of the broader Godmersham library is nevertheless telling.

For the most part, the Godmersham catalogue provides evidence of only the most typical of eighteenth-century gentlemen's libraries, the kind of library that Mr Bingley could have assembled rapidly at Netherfield. It includes many volumes of Christian theology and sermons (including Fordyce's and Blair's), history, biography and letters, politics, travel and geography, agriculture and animal husbandry, legal texts useful to a local magistrate, peerages, and a few works of numismatics and art history that suit the amateur collector or grand tourist. A smaller number of texts not in English are predominantly letters, histories and Greek and Latin classics. There are many volumes of poetry, including Aikin's (that is, Anna Laetitia Barbauld's) *Pieces* and *British Poets* and Charlotte Smith's *Sonnets*; Cowper, Ossian, Pope and Young round out the eighteenth century; earlier works include Chaucer, Milton and Spenser. As for drama, the catalogue includes Joanna Baillie's *Plays* and Congreve's *Works*, along with complete editions of Jonson and Shakespeare. The library also held *The Spectator*, *The Idler*, *The Rambler* and *The Adventurer*, along with one or two works of conduct literature. Prose fiction in English is limited, and aside from the titles belonging to the south case – that is, those not included in the 1818 catalogue – there are only the most obvious works of the masculinised early novelistic canon: Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Smollett's *Roderick Random*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.

The Austen-Knight library at Godmersham has not survived intact. Those volumes not auctioned off in the early twentieth century passed into the Knight collection, now on loan to Chawton House Library. Of the volumes listed from the south case, only *Self Control*, *Sir Charles Grandison* and the second volume of *The Wanderer* remain in the Knight collection. The bookplates in these volumes are those of Austen's nephew and great-nephew, which were added long after the novels were published. Disappointingly, none of these 11 small volumes contains substantial marginalia or any mark of ownership contemporaneous with their publication. Only the words 'stupid' and 'foolish' have been added in pencil to a section in the second volume of *Self Control* – the work Austen referred to as 'an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it' – but it is unclear if these are

in Austen's hand (*L*, 244).<sup>8</sup> I have thus far not been able to trace the books' movement from Austen's putative possession to the south case at Godmersham. Their late inclusion in the catalogue – at least 17 years after the catalogue was made in 1818, but more likely closer to the year 1853, when a new survey was made – strongly suggests that they were a later addition to the library, and were kept in a new case, apart from the existing collection of books. Notes made on loose sheets of paper in 1853 detail books missing from the library in that year. Another sheet records the relocation of books to the drawing room, in concurrence with marginal notes to the south case entry in the catalogue. The books 'removed to the Drawing Room' are themselves suggestive: Victorian piety places the central texts of Anglican Protestantism, the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer in a room which would be at the centre of family life and sociable visiting. Perhaps Austen's own books – the novels of Aunt Jane the authoress – joined them as a curiosity to be shown to guests.

The decision to remove these books also exemplifies the Austen family's attempts to 'place' Jane Austen's novels and her life in a highly determined context. Taken out of the south case, where they were shelved alongside Burney, Scott, Richardson and the works of less important authors, in the Drawing Room Austen's novels were surrounded by the unimpeachable orthodoxy of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and the novels of Maria Edgeworth. This physical rearrangement of books at Godmersham chimes in almost comically with Henry Austen's 'Biographical Notice', in which he claims that his sister was 'thoroughly religious and devout ... and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church', a woman who wrote novels 'which by many have been placed on the same shelf as the works of a D'Arblay and an Edgeworth' (*P*, 8, 4).

At this time it seems unlikely that we will ever know for certain what books Austen possessed during her lifetime, and what became of them. What survives of Austen's reading is, ultimately, to be found in her writing – in the novels, letters, poems and stories that have survived. All we can learn is to read her works, and the books that comprised the literary culture of her time, and to draw our own conclusions from her insistently critical art.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. Jane West, *Letters to a Young Lady: In Which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered* (1800), 3 vols, reprinted (New York and London: Garland, 1974), 2: 452.
2. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 17.

## 1 'From Reading to Writing It Is But One Step'

1. Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism' (1711), in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford University Press, 1994), 1–20, 1.
2. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, protesting negative reviews of Maria Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life*. Letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* 80 (March 1810), 210–12. Reprinted in Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 457–63, 457–8.
3. Frances Burney, *Evelina: or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.
4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3.
5. See Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh: 1788–1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), 21–3.
6. Roper, *Reviewing*, 27, 36–7.
7. Laura Runge, 'Momentary Fame: Female Novelists in Eighteenth-Century Book Reviews', in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century British Novel and Culture*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 276–98, 276.
8. See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173–4. St Clair's assessment of anonymity implying that, although 'a high proportion of the novelists of the romantic period were women, therefore, this was not obvious or known to readers at the time', does not necessarily agree with the evidence of novel reviewers, whose misogynistic, condescending language suggests an assumption that novelists are women. St Clair further finds, however, that 'there is little evidence that readers cared much about the identity or gender of the writers of the novels they read'. *Ibid.*, 174.
9. Runge, 'Momentary Fame', 276.
10. Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines 1740–1815: With a Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 1–2.
11. Edward Copeland, 'Money Talks: Jane Austen and the *Lady's Magazine*', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989), 153–71.

12. Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford University Press, 1998), 127–8.
13. There are echoes here of the dying words of another Sophia: 'Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint –.' See Austen, 'Love and Freindship' (MW, 102).
14. This kind of language is typical of periodicals, reviews and other critical literature of the period, and is frequently commented upon by contemporary women writers. Runge helpfully articulates the nature of this critical language: 'gender is a constitutive element of eighteenth-century literary criticism', she writes, and the 'language of gallantry ... constitutes an area of verbal play in which a highly ritualistic order belies a richly ambiguous signification' whose 'predominant implication ... was pejorative'. Laura L. Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660–1790* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3, 20.
15. The earliest to suggest so seems to have been Zachary Cope, who writes, 'So far as I am aware, no one has ever hazarded a guess as to the identity of Sophia Sentiment.' Cope reads Sophia's letter quite seriously, that is, without seeing in it any intended irony, although he admits that it 'contains some statements that are probably exaggerated in the way that young people are prone to exaggerate'. See his article 'Who Was Sophia Sentiment? Was She Jane Austen?', *The Book Collector* 15 (1966), 143–51, 143, 146. David Gilson mentions Cope's article in 'The Austens and Oxford: "Founder's Kin"', in *Jane Austen: Collected Articles and Introductions* (Privately printed, 1998), 127–9, 128.
16. Peter Sabor, 'Introduction', in Jane Austen, *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxx; Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking, 1997), 63.
17. Li-Ping Geng, 'The Loiterer and Jane Austen's Literary Identity', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 13:4 (2001), 579–92, 588, 580.
18. Margaret Doody, 'Introduction', in Jane Austen, *Catharine and Other Writings*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray (Oxford University Press, 1993), xxxv.
19. Interestingly, none of Austen's juvenile writings were dedicated to her brother James, although she does dedicate the parodic conduct-letter 'A Fragment: written to inculcate the practise of Virtue' to the infant Jane Anna Elizabeth Austen, James's eldest child (known as Anna). See MW, 71. Manuscript evidence suggests the dedications were added after the fair copies of the stories were transcribed. See, for instance, Austen, *Juvenilia*, 373, n. 1.
20. I base this claim on an analysis of the full text of *The Loiterer* and of all Austen's surviving writings, with particular emphasis on her juvenilia. Another possibility remains: that of the collaboration of Cassandra Austen, who turned 16 in 1789, and who was later described by her sister as 'the finest comic writer of the present age' (L, 5). Only a very small amount of Cassandra's writing survives, insufficient for any stylistic comparison.
21. Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 21. Klancher quotes Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 271, in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 2: 555.
22. See also Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 223.
23. Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.
24. 'I have read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do' (L, 268).

25. Sutherland, *Textual Lives*, 236–7.
26. See Austen, *Catharine*, 265.
27. Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52.
28. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849–50), ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford University Press, 1981), 88–9. I am grateful to Kathryn Sutherland for this suggestion.
29. Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 120. Fergus's study of schoolboys' reading includes revelations not only of the staggering number of novels read by boys but also their interest in books seemingly written for girls, such as the bookseller and writer John Newbery's *Goody Two-Shoes*. Rachel Brownstein cites Byron's boast in 'Endless Imitation: Austen's and Byron's Juvenilia', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 122–37, 134.
30. Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 89.
31. Austen's laughter here is a response not to the antics of a professional comedienne, but to her sister Cassandra's own writing.
32. From an 1883 letter to George Pellew, the author of what is likely the first PhD thesis on Austen, in Henry James, *Selected Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 189. Quoted in Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 8.
33. Austen's obsession with Richardson's last novel is made obvious in many stories from her juvenilia, most obviously in *Volume the First's* 'Jack and Alice'. See Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), Appendix 2: 'Sir Charles Grandison in the Juvenilia', 228–38.
34. William Mason, *Elfrida: A Dramatic Poem* (Edinburgh: Hamilton and Balfour, 1755).
35. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1791), ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford University Press, 1980), 607. Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford University Press, 1988), 268. Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian: or the Confessional of the Black Penitents, A Romance* (1796), ed. Robert Miles (London: Penguin, 2000), 337. That Elfrida was also seen as an excellent name for a sentimental heroine is borne out by two novels published during Austen's lifetime: *Elfrida: or, Paternal Ambition, By a Lady* (London: J. Johnson, 1786) and Emma Parker's *Elfrida: Heiress of Belgrove, A Novel* (London, 1811).
36. Margaret Doody, in fact, assumes that this is Austen's source for the incident: see Austen, *Catharine*, 290.
37. Alison G. Sulloway summarises the carnage: 'in "Volume the First" there are numerous descriptions of executions, amputations, female starvation, suicides, and attempted and successful murders of all kinds: matricide, fratricide, sororicide, and the attempted infanticide of an unwelcome newborn girl, who ... grows up to raise and command an army with which she slaughters her enemies'. *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 47.
38. Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54), ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols (Oxford University Press, 1972), 1: 42.
39. Frances Burney, *Camilla, or a Picture of Youth* (1796), ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford University Press, 1972), 305, 310–11.
40. Ruth Perry offers a brief discussion of possible socio-historic reasons for this phenomenon in *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), and

- revisits it in greater depth in her recent *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 374–98. George E. Haggerty explores the subject at length in *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
41. Austen would remember this many years later on the departure of a relative to Staffordshire: 'Staffordshire is a good way off; so we shall see nothing more of them till, some fifteen years hence, the Miss Coopers are presented to us, fine, jolly, handsome, ignorant girls' (*L*, 37).
  42. Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story* (1791), ed. J. M. S. Tompkins (Oxford University Press, 1988), 194.
  43. B. C. Southam points out that this passage contains another *Grandison* reference: 'the mossy bank of a purling stream, gliding thro' an enamelled mead ... feathered songsters from an adjacent grove'. See Richardson, *Grandison*, 2: 98, quoted in B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Athlone Press, 2001), 9, n. 3.
  44. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote: or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752), ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford University Press, 1989), 260.
  45. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 113.
  46. Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Plots and Possibilities: Jane Austen's Juvenilia', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989), 123–34, 131.
  47. Claudia L. Johnson, '"The Kingdom at Sixes and Sevens": Politics and the Juvenilia', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989), 45–58, 46, 51. Johnson's emphasis.
  48. Johnson, 'Politics and the Juvenilia', 52.
  49. Johnson, 'Politics and the Juvenilia', 52.
  50. See Christine Alexander, 'Nineteenth-century Juvenilia: A Survey', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11–30. For a discussion of the similarities and differences of Austen's and Byron's childhood writings, see Brownstein, 'Austen's and Byron's Juvenilia', 122–37, in the same volume.
  51. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 137.
  52. Michael Gamer cites a 12-volume collection of *Modern Novels*, published by Richard Bentley in 1692, and also mentions a 1745 collection, *The Atalantis Reviv'd*. See Michael Gamer, 'A Select Collection: Barbauld, Scott, and the Rise of the (Reprinted) Novel', in *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780–1830*, ed. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool University Press, 2008), 155–91, 157, 162.
  53. Samuel Croxall, Preface to *A Select Collection of Novels in Six Volumes. Written by the most Celebrated Authors in several Languages. Many of which never appear'd in English before; and all New Translated from the Originals, By several Eminent Hands*, 6 vols (London: John Watts, 1722), 1: n.p.
  54. Bakhtin explains the origin of Huet's essay in *Dialogic Imagination*, 22, n. m.
  55. [Pierre-Daniell] Huet, Bishop of Avranches, 'Monsieur Huet's Letter to Monsieur de Segrais, Upon the Original of Romances' [*Traité de l'origine des romans* (1670)], trans. unknown, in Croxall, *Select Collection*, 1: i–lii, ii–iii.

56. Joseph F. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 11 (my emphasis).
57. William Congreve, *Incognita: or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd. A Novel* (1692) (repr. Menston, Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1971), n.p.
58. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 31 March 1750, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 8 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 3: 19–25, 21, 19.
59. Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners; with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, on them Respectively; in a Course of Evening Conversation*, 2 vols (Dublin: Price, Exshaw, White, Cash, Colbert, Marchbank and Porter, 1785), 1: viii.
60. Susan Snider Lanser and Evelyn Torton Beck, '[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics? And What Difference Does It Make?', in *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Julia A. Sherman and Evelyn Torton Beck (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 79–91, 86.
61. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 1: xviii, xix, 119, 143.
62. John Dunlop, *The History of Fiction: Being a Critical Account of the Most Celebrated Prose Works of Fiction, from the Earliest Greek Romances to the Novels of the Present Age*, 3 vols, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1816), 1: xxxviii.
63. Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8.
64. Richard C. Taylor, 'James Harrison, *The Novelist's Magazine*, and the Early Canonizing of the English Novel', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 33:3 (Summer 1993), 629–43, 629.
65. Gamer, 'Rise of the (Reprinted) Novel', 155.
66. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 50. St Clair assumes, erroneously, the absence of women printers, although there is evidence that women were involved in all aspects of the printing and publishing industry, at least in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Paula McDowell, 'Women and the Business of Print', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700–1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135–54. Women printers held prestigious and lucrative contracts. For example, Barbauld does not see anything remarkable in the fact that Samuel Richardson 'purchased, in 1760, a moiety of the patent of law printer to his majesty, which department of his business he carried on in partnership with Miss Catherine Lintot'. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'Richardson', in *The British Novelists; with an Essay, and Prefaces Biographical and Critical, by Mrs. Barbauld*. (1810), 50 vols, 2nd edn (London: F. C. and J. Rivington et al., 1820), 1: iii–xlvi, viii.
67. See *Donaldson v. Beckett*, Proceedings in the Lords on the Question of Literary Property, 4 February to 22 February 1774. Full text available at <http://www.copyrighthistory.com/donaldson.html>, last accessed 16 February 2009.
68. See Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 93.
69. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 79. There were, of course, exceptions to this, the most obvious being the multiplicitous abridgments, anthologies and extracts of Richardson's novels, which the author began himself. See Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.
70. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1957), 30, 52. Leonard Orr concurs, explaining that even for most working men books remained an

- out-of-reach luxury. 'Even skilled workers such as tailors or masons earned 15s. to 22s. a week in the late eighteenth century, less than the price of the average novel.' *A Catalogue Checklist of English Prose Fiction, 1750–1800* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1979), 30.
71. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 115, 74.
  72. Price, *Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 7.
  73. Gamer, 'Rise of the (Reprinted) Novel', 157.
  74. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 16 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 1: 23, partly quoted in Runge, 'Momentary Fame', 289.
  75. Gamer, 'Rise of the (Reprinted) Novel', 157.
  76. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing', in *The British Novelists*, 1: 1–59, 56.
  77. Terry Castle, 'Women and Literary Criticism', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume IV: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 434–55, 452.
  78. The other post-1790 novels in *British Novelists* are Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796) and *A Simple Story*; Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1794); Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and *The Modern Griselda* (1805), also known as *The Good Governess*.
  79. Barbauld's reputation suffered greatly from reviews of the poem. John Wilson Croker's misogynistic attack on Barbauld in the *Tory Quarterly Review* is well known; Maria Edgeworth, for one, wrote privately to Barbauld offering her support, but only the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* publicly commended the poem. See *The Quarterly Review* 7 (1812), 309–13, 309; *The Monthly Repository* 7 (1812), 108 and William Keach, 'A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld's Career', *Studies in Romanticism* 33:4 (Winter 1994), 569–77, 569–71.
  80. Barbauld, 'Novel-Writing', 59, 25–32. Barbauld also makes reference to a Chinese novel available in translation, remarking however that it could 'only be interesting to an European, as exhibiting something of the manners of that remote and singular country' (32).
  81. Most of the authors selected by Barbauld are English: Maria Edgeworth and Oliver Goldsmith are the only Irish novelists included, while the Scots are represented by Henry Mackenzie, Tobias Smollett and Charlotte Lennox (Gibraltar-born, of Scottish and Irish parentage).
  82. Claudia L. Johnson, "'Let Me Make the Novels of a Country": Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820)', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 34:2 (Spring 2001), 163–79, 169.
  83. Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) (repr. New York and London: Garland, 1974), 23.
  84. Johnson, 'Barbauld's *British Novelists*', 173, 174–5.
  85. Watt dismisses Tobias Smollett as a 'follower' of Fielding, stating that the 'manifest flaws' of his novels 'prevent him from playing a very important part in the main tradition of the novel': Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 259, 290.
  86. William Hazlitt, 'On the English Novelists', in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 5: 97–120, 102.

87. Barbara M. Benedict, 'Readers, Writers, Reviewers, and the Professionalization of Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740–1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–24, 12.
88. Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 224.
89. Klancher, *English Reading Audiences*, 69.
90. Runge, 'Momentary Fame', 292.
91. As Mark Schoenfeld points out, Hazlitt's critique of *The Wanderer* transcends a mere book review to dramatise the clash of gendered genres, reflecting the 'anxieties of the quarterlies' encounter with powerful and popular women writers'. See 'Novel Marriages, Romantic Labor, and the Quarterly Press', in *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, ed. Kim Wheatley (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), 62–83, 64.
92. Runge, 'Momentary Fame', 295.
93. Klancher, *English Reading Audiences*, 51.
94. Jocelyn Harris, *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression: Jane Austen's Persuasion* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 26.
95. This is not to diminish the work of critics like J. M. S. Tompkins, whose monograph *The Popular Novel in England 1770–1800* remains one of the fullest accounts of the subject available. Tompkins, however, explicitly refrains from attempts at canon-construction, stating instead that her study is of 'tenth-rate fiction' (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1932), v. As Isobel Grundy writes, Tompkins's work did not revive widespread interest in women's fiction of the period, it was 'for specialists or for the curious, not the general run of students. Mary Lascelles, at the same period, wrote about such novels as a background to the study of Jane Austen, so her work gained wider currency.' Grundy, '(Re) discovering Women's Texts', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700–1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 179–96, 183. Lascelles (paraphrasing Samuel Johnson) posed a question that also lies at the heart of my study – 'What did Jane Austen read, and what did it give her, to think and to say?' See Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford University Press, 1939), 41.
96. David Hume, 'Of Essay-Writing' (1742), in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), part III. I, 7. Quoted in Mary A. Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789–1832* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1.
97. Runge, *Gender and Language*, 29.
98. Castle, 'Women and Criticism', 454–5.
99. Roper, *Reviewing*, 36.
100. Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. Begun by Himself and Concluded by His Daughter, Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter et al., 1820), 2: 377. Edgeworth's emphasis. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to point out that Edgeworth generally met with highly favourable reviews in *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly*.
101. See Castle, 'Women and Criticism', 443–4.
102. 'Introduction', in *Women Critics 1660–1820: An Anthology*, ed. Folger Collective on Early Women Critics (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), xiv, xviii.
103. Waters, *Women and the Profession of Criticism*, 9.

104. See Johnson, 'Barbauld's *British Novelists*', Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 12–73 and Lawrence Lipking, 'Literary Criticism and the Rise of National Literary History', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 471–97.
105. Waters, *Women and the Profession of Criticism*, 16, 18, 19.
106. Simon Jarvis, 'Criticism, Taste, Aesthetics', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24–42, 24–5.
107. Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16–17.
108. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

## 2 What's Not in Austen?

1. The title of this chapter owes a debt to Gillian Beer's paper 'What's Not in *Middlemarch*?', delivered at the University of Sydney, 4 April 2003, later published in *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Karen Chase (Oxford University Press, 2006), 15–36.
2. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'On Romances: An Imitation', in *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld: With a Memoir*, ed. Lucy Aikin, 2 vols (New York: G. & C. Carvill et al., 1826), 1: 17–20, 17–18.
3. Mary Brunton, *Discipline: A Novel. By the Author of 'Self-Control'*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller, and London: Longman et al., 1814), 1: v.
4. George Colman, *Polly Honeycombe, a dramattick novel of one act. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane*, 3rd edn (London: T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt, 1762).
5. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism*, 19.
6. Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent, Written from her own Memorandums* (1722), ed. G. A. Starr (Oxford University Press, 1971), 1.
7. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 9–10.
8. Joan Ramon Resina, 'The Short, Happy Life of the Novel in Spain', in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti, 2 vols (Princeton University Press, 2006), 1: 291–312, 294.
9. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615), trans. Charles Jarvis (1742), ed. E. C. Riley (Oxford University Press, 1992), 880.
10. Resina, 'Novel in Spain', 293, 295.
11. Delarivier Manley, Preface to *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705), in *Eighteenth-Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George L. Barnett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 22–7, 23.
12. Congreve, *Incognita*, n.p.
13. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 31 March 1750, 3: 19–25, 19–20.
14. [Walter Scott], 'Art. IX. *Emma; a Novel. By the Author of Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, &c.* 3 vols. 12 mo. London. 1815.', *Quarterly Review* No. 27 (October 1815), 188–201, 189.

15. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 3: 20.
16. See Exodus 20:16.
17. Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (1580–81), in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: Norton, 2001), 326–62, 335.
18. Clara Reeve, Preface to *The Old English Baron* (1778), ed. James Trainer and James Watt (Oxford University Press, 2003), 2, 3.
19. Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), II.i.52–3, in *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Raby (Oxford University Press, 1995), 247–307, 273.
20. Shelton's translation of the first part of Cervantes's text, *The history of the valorous and wittie knight-errant, Don-Quixote of the Mancha: Translated out of the Spanish* (London: for Ed. Blount and W. Barret, 1612), was followed in 1620 by his translation of the second part of the book.
21. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (London: Penguin, 2003), 21.
22. Hazlitt, 'On the English Novelists', 99.
23. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 32.
24. Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 21–2.
25. Carlos Fuentes, Introduction to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote*, trans. Tobias Smollett (1605, trans. 1755) (New York: Modern Library, 2004), xiii.
26. See Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England*, 114. The Heroine 'diverted me exceedingly', wrote Austen (L, 266). Strong, unorthodox religious feeling (particularly Methodism) was also seen as a kind of quixotry – for instance, Lady Delacour's gloomy, hypochondriacal Methodist turn in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), or the eponymous anti-hero of Richard Graves's *The Spiritual Quixote, or, the Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffry Wildgoose. A Comic Romance* (1772). Methodists were known, not admiringly, as great readers. Richard Altick suggests that 'the association of serious reading with what the non-Methodist world took to be sheer fanaticism may well have slowed the general spread of interest in books' in the eighteenth century: Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 37.
27. Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 27.
28. Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 8.
29. Mary Brunton, *Self Control* (1810) (London: Pandora Press, 1986), 64. This is the foundation of Austen's joke in the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey*: 'No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy', she writes, 'would have supposed her born to be an heroine' (NA, 13).
30. Deborah Knuth, "'You, Who I Know will enter into all my feelings": Friendship in Jane Austen's *Juvenilia* and *Lady Susan*', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, 95–106, 100; Juliet McMaster, 'Teaching "Love and Freindship"', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989), 135–51, 146, 148.
31. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 31.
32. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 115.

33. Virginia Woolf, 'Jane Austen Practising', *The New Statesman* (15 July 1922), 419–20, 419.
34. Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 6 vols, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1912), 3: 1–239, 2.
35. Brownstein, 'Austen's and Byron's Juvenilia', 129.
36. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 1: 111.
37. See, for instance, McMaster, 'Teaching "Love and Freindship"', 146, 148.
38. Stagecoaches feature prominently in eighteenth-century fiction. See, for example, Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.
39. Austen was to refer to 'my own Coach between Edinburgh & Sterling' to describe her coincidental meeting with many acquaintances while on a journey in 1814 (*L*, 282).
40. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 21.
41. It is not made clear in *Northanger Abbey* if Catherine is familiar with Reeve's gothic novel, or Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* on which it is largely based. Austen and her readers, however, are likely to have been aware of both novels. Kenneth Moler argues that Austen's "'borrowings'" from the common stock are often implicit invitations to the reader to see the relationships and make comparisons between her works and what they resemble; and the early nineteenth-century reader's interpretation of the novels, his [*sic*] sense of what they "said," would arise in part from such comparisons'. *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 2.
42. Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, 35.
43. Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest, Interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry* (1791), ed. Chloe Chard (Oxford University Press, 1986), 115.
44. Thirteen years is the amount of time which passed between the sale of the manuscript *Susan*, the first version of the novel, and the first publication of *Northanger Abbey* in 1818, after Austen's death.
45. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), ed. W. S. Lewis and E. J. Clery (Oxford University Press, 1996), 9.
46. Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, 2.
47. Attrib. Mary Wollstonecraft, 'Review of *The Italian*', *Analytical Review* 25 (May 1797), 516–20, 516. Quoted in appendix to Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 496, 516. Review attributed to Wollstonecraft by Deborah Rogers in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, ed. Deborah D. Rogers (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 54.
48. William Christie, 'Freedom of the Press', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford University Press, 1999), 512–13.
49. Similar scenes also occur in later, realist, literature – such as Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848).
50. Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists* (Oxford University Press, 1906), 231–2.
51. Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 436.
52. This (extremely black-humoured) joke about the limitations of fictional representation resembles Austen's later authorly in-joke about limitations of generic conventions and material book production: 'The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity' (*NA*, 250).

53. The clergyman, whose argument is clearly based on and was quite possibly written by Samuel Johnson, tells Arabella that the books she loves are 'absurd', because the 'only Excellence of Falshood ... is its Resemblance to Truth; as therefore any Narrative is more liable to be confuted by its Inconsistency with known Facts, it is at a greater Distance from the Perfection of Fiction'. Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 378. Austen, rereading Lennox's novel in 1807, found it 'a very high' amusement, and 'quite equal to what I remembered it' (L, 120).
54. Arielle Eckstut, *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003) is introduced by a fictional Oxford academic, Elfrida Drummond, PhD, supposed author of *Pride in Punctuation: Dashes, Semicolons and Inverted Commas: Austenian Punctuation Conventions and Their Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 1966), a monograph unavailable in the Bodleian catalogue. Drummond's first and last names are taken from Austen's 'Frederic and Elfrida' from *Volume the First*. Eckstut's book contains, in a passable imitation of Austen's style, a number of scenes that would be considered extreme even for Regency-era pornography, ranging from incest and well-accessorised sado-masochism to bestiality. Besides Eckstut's work, Ann Herendeen's queered reworking, *Pride/Prejudice: A Novel of Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet, and Their Forbidden Lovers* (New York: Harper, 2010), which explores, among others, a sexual relationship between Darcy and Bingley, seems quaintly derivative. See also Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance – Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem!* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009). The undead are not wholly out of place in late eighteenth-century fiction – there are plenty of zombies in William Beckford's novel *Vathek* (1786) for instance – but they remain noticeably absent from Austen's oeuvre. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* may be the first in a new wave of Austen horror: it has now been joined by a 'prequel', Steve Hockensmith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2010); Michael Thomas Ford's *Jane Bites Back: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2010) recasts Austen herself as a vengeful, frustrated vampire; and in post-production is the film *Pride and Predator*, directed by Will Clark, which introduces violent extra-terrestrials into Hampshire, for which see Dave Itzkoff, 'Austen Meets Alien in "Pride and Predator"', *New York Times* 18 February 2009, C2.
55. Williams, *The Country and the City*, 166.
56. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Janeites', in *Debts and Credits* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 147–74, 158–9. Kipling's emphasis.
57. D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.
58. Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October* 43 (1987), 208, quoted in Miller, *Secret of Style*, 4.
59. Sue Birtwhistle and Susie Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 1995), 97.
60. Dan Zeff (dir.), *Lost in Austen* (ITV, 2008), episodes 4, 1.
61. Irvine Welsh, 'Lorraine Goes to Livingston: A Rave and Regency Romance', in *Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), 1–72.
62. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 114; George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1870–71), ed. David Carroll (Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.
63. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 33.
64. See John E. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). As it is, riots and rebellions tend to be

treated explicitly only in historical fiction. The second volume of Lee's *The Recess*, as mentioned above, ends with an appallingly bloody account of a slave uprising in late sixteenth-century Jamaica (see *Recess*, 2: 125–9), while Scott's account of the 1745 Jacobite uprising in *Waverley* places emphasis on the positive outcomes stemming from its failure, and Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1794) focuses mainly on the hero's experiences on the periphery of war.

65. Wollstonecraft, 'Review of *The Italian*', 516.

### 3 Texts and Pretexts

1. Dunlop, *The History of Fiction*, 1: xxx–xxxi.
2. Hazlitt, 'On the English Novelists', 97.
3. Julia Kristeva, *Word, Dialogue and Novel* (1969), in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 35–61, 37.
4. The term 'betweenities' was coined by Caroline Austen in a letter to her cousin James Edward Austen-Leigh, 1 April (1869?), advising him not to publish them. See James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), in *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford University Press, 2002), 218, n. 43.
5. There is no conclusive evidence for the date of the composition of *Elinor and Marianne* or *First Impressions*. J. E. Austen-Leigh believed that his aunt had written 'something similar in story and character' to *Sense and Sensibility* before 1797, and that *First Impressions* was begun in October 1796, and finished in August of the following year, at which point Austen began *Elinor and Marianne*, working from earlier drafts: see *Memoir*, 43. Brian Southam writes that biographical and stylistic evidence suggests *Elinor and Marianne* was produced 'about 1797', although he admits that this is 'pure guess-work', see *Austen's Literary Manuscripts*, 45. Kathryn Sutherland concurs that 'a possible 1795 novel-in-letters version of *Sense and Sensibility*' is supported by Cassandra Austen's note mentioning 'Elinor & Marianne', and that both novels were substantially redrafted in two periods, 1795–98 and 1810–12: see 'Chronology of Composition and Publication', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12–22, 16–17, 21.
6. Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 49; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1.
7. Mary Waldron argues that *First Impressions* must have predated *Sense and Sensibility*, because its comic 'atmosphere is closer to the juvenilia and *Catharine*': *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62. I disagree, however, seeing in *Pride and Prejudice* a later stage in the evolution of what Margaret Oliphant called Austen's 'feminine cynicism', 'the soft and silent disbelief of a spectator who has to look at a great many things without showing any outward discomposure, and who has learned to give up any more classification of social sins, and to place them instead upon the level of absurdities'. 'Miss Austen and Miss Mitford', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 107 (1870), 290–305, reprinted in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998): 1: 375–86, 377.
8. What has become an emerging narrative of the intertwined history of women's rights and the novel in the early nineteenth century is supported by historical

- and bibliographic surveys. See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) and Peter Garside, ‘The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Disposal’, and analysis of findings in *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of English Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford University Press, 2000), 2: 15.
9. Germaine de Staël, Preface to *Delphine* (1802), trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 4.
  10. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.3.29–38.
  11. Austen’s reference is to Scott’s *Marmion, A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808): ‘I do not rhyme to that dull elf, | Who cannot image to himself’: in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (Oxford University Press, 1931), 89–206, 169. See also *L*, 420, n. 5.
  12. There is persuasive evidence that *First Impressions* was, like *Elinor and Marianne*, an epistolary novel, although there is no critical consensus on the subject. For a discussion of the evidence for and against this claim, including Brian Southam’s argument that *First Impressions* was indeed epistolary, see William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 134.
  13. Joe Bray argues that critics have underestimated the role of epistolary fiction in Austen’s development of free indirect style, in particular that ‘the roots of Austen’s third-person free indirect thought can be traced back to the first-person letters of Harriet Byron’, whose ‘switching between her narrating and experiencing selves leads directly to the interaction between the narrator’s voice and the character’s consciousness in Austen’s fiction’. See *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 46.
  14. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ‘Life of Samuel Richardson, with Remarks on his Writings’, in *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson* (1804), reprinted in Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 364. Although Richardson was widely credited by his contemporaries and followers with the explosion of epistolary fiction, Ruth Perry and James Raven both point out this is not necessarily the case. Perry writes that ‘epistolary fiction flourished in England long before Richardson wrote *Pamela*. Some of it was original, some translated from the French; some was burlesque, some didactic’ but the form itself was well established early in the eighteenth century: see *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, xi. Raven points out that the empirical evidence of epistolary novels’ publication does not follow the ‘Richardsonian boom’ theory: ‘New epistolary novels made up no more than a tenth of new fiction published in any one year between 1750 and 1760. By the late 1760s, however, almost a third of new titles were written in letters. Although more thoroughgoing bibliographical work has yet to be done, letter novels of the 1790s, while representing a diminishing proportion of overall novel output, still averaged over a dozen titles a year.’ *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 46.
  15. Southam, *Austen’s Literary Manuscripts*, 55–6.
  16. Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 14.
  17. Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel*, 166.
  18. *Sense and Sensibility*’s nuanced study of blamelessness and culpability, especially in Marianne’s case, may also owe something to Austen’s rejection of epistolarity,

- according to Barbara Zaczek's theory that the 'death of a certain kind of epistolary fiction – the tale of seduction and betrayal – at the end of the eighteenth century marks ... a conscious reaction on the part of women writers who rejected it as a form that fostered the image of a female victim'. See Zaczek, *Censored Sentiments: Letters and Censorship in Epistolary Novels and Conduct Material* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 19.
19. For a detailed discussion of *Celestina* as a source for *Sense and Sensibility*, see Loraine Fletcher's introduction in Charlotte Smith, *Celestina* (1791), ed. Loraine Fletcher (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 40–1.
  20. In 'Jack and Alice', one character succeeds in fulfilling the offer suggested by Lord Melville to *The Excursion*'s Maria Villiers – literally becoming 'the favourite Sultana of the great Mogul' (MW, 26); see also Frances Brooke, *The Excursion* (1777), ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Hope D. Cotton (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 63.
  21. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield: A Tale, Supposed to be written by himself* (1766), ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford University Press, 2008), 12, 106, 108, 164.
  22. Arguably, however, Austen implies that Colonel Brandon plays a kind of parallel role, when news of Willoughby's abandonment of Eliza reaches Willoughby's aunt Mrs Smith, who promptly disinherits him. It seems more than likely that Brandon is responsible for her information.
  23. The name 'Brandon Hall' is revealed in Richardson's revisions to his text. Peter Sabor's Penguin edition of the novel, which attempts to reconstruct Richardson's final version of the text from an 1801 copy, gives the name 'Brandon Hall', where the first edition does not. See Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740, 1801), ed. Peter Sabor (London: Penguin, 1980), 287. Compare Richardson, *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740–41), ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford University Press, 2001), 252.
  24. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 93.
  25. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 4.4.1–2 and 4.7.153–8.
  26. Staël, *Delphine*, 16, 58, 13, 69. Léonce's correspondent is his English friend Mr Barton, who shares his name with the Dashwoods' cottage.
  27. This was a commonplace of early responses to Richardson's tragedy. Scott mentions that even Richardson's trusted correspondent Lady Bradshaigh found his villain attractive, sparking Richardson's attempts to darken his portrait of the ultimate rake. See Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 230.
  28. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady* (1747–48), ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), 36. Richardson's emphasis.
  29. Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 231.
  30. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 57–8.
  31. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 75.
  32. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.3.114–15.
  33. Eight years later she reproved her novel-writing niece for allowing a character to 'plunge into a "vortex of Dissipation". I do not object to the Thing,' she wrote, 'but I cannot bear the expression; – it is such thorough novel slang – and so old, that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened' (L, 289).
  34. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 75. See also Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 109.

35. Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 32.
36. Oliver MacDonagh explains clearly the social implications of personal mobility and the income (or expenditure) necessary to maintain status in genteel society, especially in London. See *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 58–9.
37. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 18.
38. Richardson, *Grandison*, 1: 348, 340–1.
39. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford University Press, 2008), 63–283, 229. Charlotte Lucas's 'prudential' marriage to Mr Collins is possibly the clearest iteration of the concept in fiction (PP, 178).
40. Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. Ross, 429. Fielding argues that this fetishisation of virginity is Richardson's sole topic in *Pamela*: 'The Comprehensiveness of his Imagination must be prodigious! It has stretched out this diminutive mere Grain of Mustard-seed (a poor Girl's little, &c.) into a Resemblance of ... Heaven.' Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews. In which, the many Falshoods and Misrepresentations of a Book called Pamela, Are exposed and refuted; and all the matchless Arts of that young Politician, set in a true and just Light* (1741), in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford University Press, 2008), 311.
41. Burney, *Evelina*, 234, 257, 258.
42. Burney, *Evelina*, 259.
43. Galperin, *Historical Austen*, 181.
44. Brooke, *The Excursion*, 76, 7, 19–20, 22, 44, 63, 91, 112. Brooke's emphasis.
45. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1990), 264, 265.
46. John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–49), ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford University Press, 1985), 39–40.
47. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 119.
48. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment* (1798), in *Mary and The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford University Press, 2007), 98.
49. 'For the banns entry she created a "Henry Frederic Howard Fitzwilliam, of London"; for the marriage entry changed him to "Edmund Arthur William Mortimer, of Liverpool"; and finally decided that her mythical husband would be plain "Jack Smith".' Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, 70.
50. Cleland, *Memoirs*, 22–3.
51. Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford University Press, 1994), 15. Edgeworth's emphasis.
52. A 'Smithfield bargain' was contemporary slang for a prudentially beneficial marriage: for example, Lydia Languish complains about being made 'a mere Smithfield bargain of'. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (1775), in *The School for Scandal and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Corder (Oxford University Press, 1998), 72.
53. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.3.31–2.
54. Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. Ross, 637.
55. The working-class Pamela Andrews is exceptional among novelistic heroines, in that she has no claim to the class status of her husband. She is joined in

this exclusive category by the servant Monimia in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1794). Pamela is not a gentlewoman fallen on hard times, or even a gentlewoman removed at birth from her true family and raised in virtuous obscurity, but a servant who (after surviving hundreds of pages of sexualised trauma) makes good. This, of course, was Henry Fielding's chief objection to the novel. 'The Instruction which it conveys to Servant-Maids, is, I think, very plainly this, To look out for their Masters as sharp as they can. The Consequences of which will be, besides Neglect of their Business ... that if the Master is not a Fool, they will be debauched by him; and if he is a Fool, they will marry him. Neither of which ... we desire should be the Case of our Sons.' See *Shamela*, 313.

56. Edward Copeland, Introduction to Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge University Press, 2006), lii. Alistair Duckworth has argued that this disinheritor, or the 'degradation that threatens Austen's heroines', should be read on what he calls 'a deeper level' with 'implications beyond the social, implications that are metaphysical or theological in nature'. He continues, 'the isolation and, often, real despair that her heroines experience is followed by a reinstatement into society ... The typical Austen plot may move in the direction of isolation and subjectivism, but in the end there is a rapprochement between self and society.' The circularity of this plot structure, he concludes, is 'evidently based to a quite explicit degree on the myth of the Fall'. *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*, 2nd edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 4, 8, 12.
57. Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 51.
58. Ruth Perry, 'Women in Families: The Great Disinheritance', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700–1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 111–31, 129.
59. Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 49.
60. It is typical of Austen's irony that this most heroic action ultimately helps no one but Willoughby himself, who arrives too late to do anything but deliver a speech in which he attempts to justify his own behaviour.
61. [Charles Gildon], *The Golden Spy: or a Political Journal of the British Nights Entertainments of War and Peace and Love and Politics: Wherein are laid open the Secret Miraculous Power and Progress of Gold, in the Courts of Europe. Intermix'd with Delightful Intrigues, Memoirs, Tales, and Adventures, Serious and Comical* (London: J. Woodward and J. Morphew, 1709), 2.
62. Burney, *Evelina*, 28. Burney's italics emphasise the novelty of the verb.
63. 'Lord Grondale put out towards her, the only hand which now obeyed his will. His look asked forgiveness; hers granted it. He cast his eyes on his nephew, to whom he now held out his hand. Sir Charles [alias Hermsprong] took it with respect,' etc. Robert Bage, *Hermsprong; or Man As He Is Not* (1796), ed. Pamela Perkins (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 336.
64. The legal wrangling surrounding and suffusing marriage in eighteenth-century novels is in no way diminished by the real-world enactment of the Hardwicke Marriage Act (1753), which sought to regulate various aspects of matrimonial ceremony. See Perry, *Novel Relations*, 277–9.
65. As I write, there are daily reports in international news media on the subject of marriage between parties of the same sex, while a series of referenda in a number of US states and court decisions there, in Canada, South Africa and several European nations attests to the continued public interest in and regulation of

marriage. For Commonwealth nations such as the UK and Australia, the last decade has witnessed the greatest legislative involvement in the *definition* of marriage since Hardwicke's Act in the mid-eighteenth century.

66. 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony', *Book of Common Prayer* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1968), 357.
67. Cleland's Fanny Hill, whose wealth persuades her first lover to marry her, is a significant exception to this rule. Cecilia Beverley, heroine of Burney's *Cecilia*, must first relinquish her inheritance (conditional on her husband's changing his surname to hers) before she can marry Mortimer Delville.
68. Clarissa's rape is only possible outside the context of marriage – until the 1991 House of Lords decision in *R v R*, English law recognised marriage vows as effective consent to sexual intercourse: see David Ormerod, *Smith and Hogan: Criminal Law*, 12th edn (Oxford University Press, 2008), 701. Previously the authority expounded by Matthew Hale's seventeenth-century legal treatise held sway: 'the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract'. *Historia Placitorum Coronæ. The History of the Pleas of the Crown*, By Sir Matthew Hale Knt. Sometime Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench (London, 1736), 629.
69. See Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 73–80, 89.
70. That this typical Romantic-era concern persists in the present day can be seen in responses to popular novels such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, where the fictional heroines' actions are discussed in terms of their appropriateness as a model for young women's behaviour. See, for example, Clare Cannon, 'Why I've Lost My Hunger for Violent, Unethical Games', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 2012, n.p.
71. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 1: 139.
72. Richardson, *Grandison*, 1: 13.
73. Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife. Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals* (1808), 2 vols, 5th edn (London: Cadell and Davies, 1809), 2: 82.
74. John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1790), in *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*, intro. Vivien Jones (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), iii–53, 13.
75. Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 110.
76. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688), ed. Catherine Gallagher (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's Press, 2000), 71.
77. Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 183.
78. The story of Lætitia and Daphne appeared in *The Spectator* No. 33, 7 April 1711. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is from Matthew 25:1–12.
79. See Armand Marie Leroi, *Mutants: On the Form, Varieties and Errors of the Human Body* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 23–6, 61–2.
80. Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749), ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (Oxford University Press, 1998), 505.
81. Mary Russell Mitford, Letter to Sir William Elford, 20 December 1814, in *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford: Related in a Selection from her Letters to her Friends*, ed. A. G. L'Estrange, 3 vols (London: Bentley, 1870), 1: 300. Reproduced by *British Fiction 1800–1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception*.

82. This is not to suggest that *Pride and Prejudice* lacks *Sense and Sensibility's* literary forbears and miscellaneous source-texts. Elizabeth Bennet herself, 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print' (L, 210), clearly descends from *Clarissa's* Anna Howe and *Grandison's* Charlotte Grandison. Gerard A. Barker argues for Darcy's indebtedness to Charlotte's peerless brother in *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Newark: Delaware University Press, 1985), 146–72, while Gay examines *Much Ado About Nothing* as a source for Austen's plot in *Austen and the Theatre*, 79.
83. John Wiltshire, 'Mr Darcy's Smile', address to 'New Directions in Austen Studies' Conference, Chawton House, 9 July 2009.

#### 4 'A Good Spot for Fault-Finding'

1. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 5.
2. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, 3rd edn (1751), reprinted in *The Clarissa Project*, general ed. Florian Stuber, 8 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 8: 215, quoted in Price, *Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 28.
3. Price, *Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 28.
4. Germaine de Staël, *Literature Considered in Its Relationship to Social Institutions* (1800), in *Politics, Literature, and National Character*, trans. and ed. Morroe Berger (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 139–256, 234.
5. 'Come, a second rape of the lock, Belinda.' Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 76.
6. See Miller, *Secret of Style*, 2–3.
7. See John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 16; Kingsley Amis, *What Became of Jane Austen? And Other Questions* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 16; and Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 143.
8. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 79.
9. Jacqueline Labbe, 'Narrating Seduction: Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 113–28, 115.
10. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford University Press, 2009), 71. There is, in fact, a very similar bayonets-through-the-bedcurtains scene in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783–85).
11. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1791), in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–62, 6, 8.
12. In *The Improvement of the Estate*, Alistair Duckworth pointed out *Mansfield Park's* connections to Burke's *Reflections*. Clara Tuíte argues that what she calls 'Austen's conservative Romantic project' renders *Mansfield Park* a 'Burkean novel', writing that '[i]f Burke's *Reflections* offers political history as family romance, *Mansfield Park* is the family romance as political history'. *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.
13. Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House* (1794), ed. Jacqueline M. Labbe (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 353. Smith is, of course, not the

only Romantic writer to question the propaganda concept of 'glory'. The young Robert Southey's dramatised version of the 1381 Peasants' Rebellion – a popular subject of eighteenth-century chapbooks – contains the following passage: 'year follows year, | And still we madly prosecute the war; – | Draining our wealth, distressing our poor peasants, | Slaughtering our youths, & all to crown our chiefs | With glory! – I detest the hell-sprung name'. *Wat Tyler: A Dramatic Poem, in Three Acts*. By Robert Southey, Esq. *Poet Laureate* (Newcastle: W. Fordyce, [1817]). The publisher Sherwood produced the chapbook specifically to embarrass Southey: the laureate was unsuccessful in his efforts to have his youthful, radical work suppressed. See St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 316–17.

14. See Smith, *Old Manor House*, 351. Anne K. Mellor points out that Orlando's pronounced 'femininity embodies a critique not just of the ideology of feudal aristocracy but also of the ideology of patrilineal bourgeois capitalism; his revulsion at the brutality of modern war, at primogeniture and the indulgence of the eldest son, and at the greed of commerce, are all endorsed by the novel': *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 9.
15. Smith, *Old Manor House*, 354.
16. William Cowper, *The Task* (1785), from *Book I: The Sofa*, ll. 338–9, in *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. H. S. Milford (Oxford University Press, 1911), 136.
17. Fanny's reference is to two stanzas from Walter Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 1–88, 10. John Wiltshire points out that Scott himself may be referring here to scenes using similar language in Smith's *The Old Manor House*. See Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 662, n. 10.
18. See Kenneth Curry, *Robert Southey: A Reference Guide* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall, 1977), xx.
19. Rob Gossedge and Stephen Knight, 'The Arthur of the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 103–19, 105, 107.
20. A. Croker, ed., 'King Arthur, a Poem', *Gentleman's Magazine* 68 (September, November), 820–1, 1012; Supplement 1172–5. George Ellis, ed., *Specimens of Early English Romances in Metre, Chiefly Written During the Early Part of the XIV Century* (London: Longman et al., 1805). See Daniel P. Nastali and Phillip C. Boardman (eds), *The Arthurian Annals: The Tradition in English from 1250 to 2000*, 2 vols (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1: 67, 76.
21. Edward Jones, *The Bardic Museum, of Primitive British Literature; and Other Admirable Rarities; Forming the second volume of the Musical, Poetical, and Historical Relicks of The Welsh Bards and Druids: Drawn from Authentic Documents of Remote Antiquity; (With Great Pains Now Rescued from Oblivion,) and Never Before Published* (London: Printed by A. Strahan for the Author, 1802), 20.
22. Although no new version of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, first printed by William Caxton, was published between 1634 and 1816, the legends appear to have been known throughout the seventeenth and into the late eighteenth century from other medieval sources, and in chapbooks, histories, plays, poems and through second-hand accounts, such as in Scott's notes to *Marmion* (1808). Marylyn Jackson Parin points out that both Scott and Southey read Malory as boys, and that by the 1760s 'growing antiquarian interest in the older literature resulted in increased attention to Malory's work. Thomas Warton's *Observations on the Fairy*

- Queen* clearly showed his close familiarity with the *Morte Darthur* and brought to attention Malory's work – its matter, its previous popularity and influence.' See Parin's introduction to *Sir Thomas Malory: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1985), 13, 6.
23. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 505.
  24. Walter Scott, *The Bridal of Triermain; or, the Vale of St John. A Lover's Tale* (1813), in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 553–89, 560.
  25. Scott, *Marmion*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 142–3. Of course, seductive female harp-playing features in a number of novels too, particularly those set in the Celtic fringe, such as Sidney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), and Scott's own *Waverley* (1814).
  26. These include Croker's poem and George Ellis's quotations, mentioned above. Nastali and Boardman write that Richard Polwhele's *The History of Cornwall* (Falmouth: Cadell and Davies, 1803) gives 'an extended account of the Uter/Gothlois/Igerna story'. See *Arthurian Annals*, 2: 74. Dunlop devotes most of the first volume of his *History of Fiction* to the Arthurian legends, including those surrounding Arthur's birth and the sorcery of his sister, 'the fairy Morgana'. Dunlop, *The History of Fiction*, 1: 244.
  27. Thomas Malory, *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of Kyng Arthur; of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, Theyr Merveyllous Enquestes and Aduentures, Thachyeuyng of the Sanc Greal; and in the End Le Morte Darthur, with the Dolourous Deth and Departyng Out of thys Worlde of Them Al. With an Introduction and Notes, by Robert Southey, Esq.*, 2 vols (Printed from Caxton's edition, 1485) (London, 1817), 1: 4.
  28. Caroline Austen, quoted in Austen-Leigh, *Memoir*, 72.
  29. More, *Cælebs*, 1: vi.
  30. Even Brunton seems to balk a little at her novel's turn of events – the narrative avoids a description of the most extreme circumstance of the heroine's maiden canoe voyage by having her fall unconscious just as she is about to plunge over a waterfall.
  31. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 13–14.
  32. Williams, *The Country and the City*, 117.
  33. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 14.
  34. Interestingly, it seems Austen does tend to respond to marriage announcements with doggerel poetry. See 'Mr. Gell and Miss Gill' and 'A Middle-aged Flirt' (*MW*, 444).
  35. Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford University Press, 2003), 62–3.
  36. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. James Kinsley, notes by Jane Stabler (Oxford University Press, 2003), 402.
  37. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 161; Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, 148. See also Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Wiltshire, 670, n. 3.
  38. Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, 161.
  39. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford University Press, 2004), bk 5, l. 19, 116.
  40. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 2, ll. 681–5, 96.
  41. Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Milton', in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works* (1779), ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 1: 291.
  42. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. J. T. Boulton (Oxford University Press, 1990), 59. Quoted

- in Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 50. See also pp. 85, 167, 171 and 181.
43. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 2, l. 1048, 60.
  44. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 9, ll. 425–8, 218.
  45. Her stooping under a hot sun also links Fanny with the slaves working on Sir Thomas's Antigua plantations.
  46. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 1, l. 1, 3.
  47. Johnson, 'Life of Milton', 282.
  48. Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*, 60.
  49. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 8, ll. 540–4, 202.
  50. William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), ed. Robert N. Essick (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 2002), Plate 4.
  51. More, *Cælebs*, 1: 1, 3–4.
  52. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 8, ll. 40, 42, 188.
  53. More, *Cælebs*, 1: 8.
  54. William Wordsworth, 'London: 1802', in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford University Press, 2000), 286.
  55. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 5, ll. 501–3, 130.
  56. More, *Cælebs*, 1: 347. More's emphasis.
  57. The play is in Austen's hand, but its authorship remains in doubt. See Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge University Press, 2008), cxii–cxviii.
  58. More, *Cælebs*, 1: 348.
  59. Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage* (1814) (London: Routledge, 1893), 352–3.
  60. Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), trans. and ed. Sylvia Raphael (Oxford University Press, 1998), 122.
  61. See also Mary Waldron's assessment of More's *Cælebs* and *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, 89.
  62. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 23.
  63. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 4, ll. 635–8, 103.
  64. More, *Cælebs*, 2: 74–5.
  65. Edgeworth, *Patronage*, 199.
  66. Anthony Mandal, in fact, believes Henry Crawford resembles *Self Control*'s anti-hero Colonel Hargrave, the sexually unscrupulous heir to a titled estate, against whom Laura must exercise the self-control of the title. See *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 109.
  67. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 1, l. 268, 12.
  68. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk 1, ll. 254–5, 11.
  69. For a modern reader this point in the novel recalls George Orwell's tortured, brainwashed hero Winston's pseudo-awakening: 'it was all right, everything was all right. The struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.' *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), 311.

## 5 'Hints from Various Quarters'

1. Scott, 'Art. IX. *Emma*; a Novel', 189.
2. John L. Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 136. Quoted in Klancher, *English Reading Audiences*, 69.

3. The best efforts of Jeffrey's biographer, William Christie, have not, as yet, brought to light the means by which Austen learned of Jeffrey's approbation. *The Edinburgh* did not review any of Austen's novels on their publication, and seldom took notice of fiction in general, but the magazine printed several reviews praising Edgeworth's novels. As Stuart Curran writes, 'Francis Jeffrey appears to have written them all.' See 'Women and the *Edinburgh Review*', in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 195–208, 199. Christie does note that Murray sent a copy of *Emma* to the publisher William Blackwood for Scottish advertisement and distribution. Blackwood responded to Murray: 'Much however as I am disappointed in the conduct of the story, I am quite delighted with the Book upon the whole.' John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland Acc. 12604/1115, quoted in William Christie, 'Jane Austen and the John Murray Archive', *Sensibilities* 36 (June 2008): 5–19, 18.
4. Richardson, *Grandison*, 3: 228.
5. Austen-Leigh, *Memoir*, 119.
6. We can speculate that Austen, who as a child greatly admired Delamere, the obsessive anti-hero of Smith's *Emmeline*, may well have enjoyed creating such an unrelentingly passionate villain. See 'The History of England' (MW, 143).
7. Chapman's printing of the names as footnotes comes close to visually reproducing the appearance of the manuscript, MS MA 1034.1, Morgan Library & Museum, New York.
8. Anthony Mandal finds that while the 'Plan of a Novel's 'ingredients are ludicrously juxtaposed with one another, the majority of them can be found in various permutations in any number of contemporary novels that enjoyed popular acclaim': *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, 183.
9. See also Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 143. Fielding's phrase is, in fact, 'nobody's enemy but his own'.
10. Dr Syntax is the quixotic hero of William Combe's *The Tour of Dr Syntax in Search of the Picturesque: A Poem* (1812) and its sequels, illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson (London: Methuen, 1903). The clergyman-schoolteacher's popular comic misadventures are provoked by his extreme poverty and naïveté. Austen sent a message via Cassandra to her niece that she had 'seen nobody in London yet with such a long chin as Dr Syntax' (L, 267).
11. Bage, *Hermesprong*, 74.
12. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 3: 21.
13. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1847–48), ed. John Sutherland (Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.
14. Barbauld, 'Novel-Writing', 44–5.
15. Barbauld, 'On Romances', 19.
16. Runge, *Gender and Language*, 113.
17. Barbauld, 'Novel-Writing', 43–4, 45.
18. Siskin, *The Work of Writing*, 22–3, 26. Siskin's emphasis.
19. Barbauld, 'Novel-Writing', 45–6.
20. Bage, *Hermesprong*, 160.
21. Maria Edgeworth, *The Good Governess and Other Stories* (1801) (London: Blackie and Son, n.d.), 18–19.
22. Germaine de Staël, *Essay on Fictions* (1795), in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2001), 597–604, 597, 598, 599.

23. William Hazlitt, for instance, writes on the first *Waverley* novels: 'In knowledge, in variety, in truth of painting, in costume and scenery, in freshness of subject and in untired interest, in glancing lights and the graces of a style passing at will from grave to gay, from lively to severe, at once romantic and familiar, having the utmost force of imitation and apparent freedom of invention; these novels have the highest claims to admiration.' 'On the English Novelists', 116.
24. Galperin, *Historical Austen*, 181.
25. It is the inset letters, within Austen's texts, that finally exploit this previously unexplored potential in epistolary fiction. For discussion of this see Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford University Press, 1996), 174 and 216, n. 3. Susan Pepper Robbins distinguishes between the 'effective', reliable letter of epistolary fiction and Austen's use of the inset letter as an 'affective gesture', one that demands careful scrutiny by readers *within* the text (Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse) as well as by readers of the text. See 'Jane Austen's Epistolary Fiction', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989), 215–24.
26. Tillotama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2.
27. See Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
28. Staël, *Essay on Fictions*, 597.
29. I am certainly not the first to claim *Emma* as another novel in the tradition of quixote fictions. Peter Knox-Shaw, for instance, writes that in '*Emma* quixotry is generalized further than in *Northanger Abbey*, for we are shown that it is not only heroines that "can see nothing that does not answer". Mr Woodhouse, for one, turns out to be as much of an imaginist as his daughter.' *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 198.
30. Elizabeth Hamilton, 'Essay III: On the Effects Resulting from a Peculiar Direction of Attention on the Power of Imagination, and in Producing the Emotions of Taste', in *A Series of Popular Essays, Illustrative of the Principals Essentially Connected with the Improvement of the Understanding, the Imagination, and the Heart* (Edinburgh: Mannes and Miller, 1813), 155–260, 170–4.
31. Spacks, *Privacy*, 10.
32. Richardson, *Grandison*, 1: 29.
33. Smith, *Celestina*, 252.
34. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion*, 173.
35. See, for instance, Claudia Johnson's discussion of the way in which '*Emma* offends the sexual sensibilities of many of her critics', citing Alistair Duckworth, Marvin Mudrick, Edmund Wilson, Wayne Booth and Lionel Trilling's '[t]ransparently misogynist, sometimes even homophobic' critical subtext. *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 122–3.
36. See Brunton, *Self-Control*, 247. Austen, of course, explores the culturally loaded trope of women walking alone in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*.
37. Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 20–1.
38. Elizabeth Inchbald, 'Letter to *The Artist*', in *The Artist*, No. 14 Saturday, 13 June 1807. Reprinted in Inchbald, *Nature and Art*, ed. Shawn Lisa Maurer (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2005), Appendix A: 161–6, 162.

39. West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2: 450. West's emphasis.
40. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 1: 78.
41. Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 326.
42. Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (1798), 2 vols, ed. Gina Luria (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1974), 1: 336. Of course, many women of the Romantic period enjoyed adventures closer to those of *Persuasion's* Mrs Croft than Emma's excursion to Box Hill. In her bibliographical work *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford University Press, 1990), Jane Robinson lists several women who published accounts of their remarkable journeys, including Mary Shelley, Lady Hester Stanhope and Ann Radcliffe. Prior to the Victorian period such adventuring women were rare; however, the popularity and proliferation of 'Travels' as a genre, particularly in magazines aimed at a female readership, suggest that many Romantic-era women held a sincere, if unsatisfied desire to 'have adventures'.
43. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), in *Major Works*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford University Press, 1984), 62–164, 91.
44. Susan Ferrier, Letter to Miss Clavering, 1816. Quoted in B. C. Southam (ed.) *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 1: 15.
45. According to a note probably made by Cassandra Austen, her sister began *Emma* on 21 January 1814 and finished it on 29 March 1815. The note, held by the Morgan Library, New York, is nevertheless catalogued as being in Austen's own hand: see MS MA 1034.4, Morgan Library & Museum, New York.
46. Brunton, *Discipline*, 1: 4, 15, 16, 38, 34, 191.
47. Brunton, *Discipline*, 2: 44, 274.
48. Compare Edward Nares: 'really and truly, *making love* is such a ridiculous business, *especially where one is actually in earnest*, that after writing it all out at length, fact after fact, just as it happened, taking up nearly forty or fifty pages, I have determined to strike it all out again, and not let you know a word about it'. *Think's-I-to-Myself. A Serio-ludicro, Tragico-comico Tale, written by Think's-I-to-Myself Who?*, 2 vols (London, 1811), 2: 59. Nares's emphasis.
49. Brunton, *Discipline*, 1: v. Privately, Brunton's attitudes seem to have been very different. The day she finished *Discipline*, Brunton wrote: 'Why should an epic or a tragedy be supposed to hold such an exalted place in composition, while a novel is almost a nickname for a book? Does not a novel admit of as noble sentiments – as lively descriptions – as natural character – as perfect unity of action – and a moral as irresistible as either of them? I protest, I think a fiction containing a just representation of human beings and of their actions – a connected, interesting and probable story – conducting to a useful and impressive moral lesson – might be one of the greatest efforts of human genius. Let the admirable construction of fable in *Tom Jones* be employed to unfold characters like Miss Edgeworth's – let it be told with the eloquence of Rousseau, and with the simplicity of Goldsmith – let it be all this, and Milton need not have been ashamed of the work! But novels have got an ill name, therefore "give the novels to the dogs". I have done with them, for if even the best possible could be comparatively despised, what is to become of mine?' Letter to Mrs Izett, 15 August 1814. Quoted in Mary McKerrow, *Mary Brunton: The Forgotten Scottish Novelist* (Kirkwall, Orkney: The Orcadian, 2001), 132–3.
50. Even towards the novel's conclusion, Emma is yet to renounce her inveterate matchmaking. On the birth of Mrs Weston's daughter, Emma is 'decided in

- wishing for a Miss Weston. She would not acknowledge that it was with any view of making a match for her, hereafter, with either of Isabella's sons' (*E*, 461).
51. Scott, 'Art. IX. *Emma; a Novel*', 189.
  52. 'Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* will not last.' Quoted in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 696.
  53. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, ed. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.1.27 and 1.3.102–3.
  54. Textual evidence – Sir Toby's 'hang thee brock' (that is, badger) – supports Malvolio's conventional presentation as a black-clad puritan, and Maria's letter encourages him to show his requited love 'in thy smiling, thy smiles become thee well'. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.99, 165.
  55. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 3.1.135–41.
  56. Thomas Rand, 'Emma and *Twelfth Night*', *Persuasions* 30 (2008), 181–6, 181.
  57. I am grateful to Ben Morgan for this suggestion. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.113–33.
  58. In a paper delivered to the 1998 Jane Austen Society AGM at Chawton, 'Emma Considered as a Detective Story', quoted in David H. Bell, 'Fun with Frank and Jane: Austen and Detective Fiction', *Persuasions On-line* 28:1 (Winter 2007).
  59. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader; or Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse; Selected from the Best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; for the Improvement of Young Women. By Mr. CRESSWICK, Teacher of Elocution: To which is Prefixed a Preface, Containing Some Hints on Female Education* (1789), intro. Moira Ferguson (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1980), 120.
  60. Lionel Trilling, 'Introduction' to *Emma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), x. Quoted in Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 123.
  61. This is Joyce's phrase, but not necessarily inapposite to Frank Churchill, who is the literary descendant of *Belinda's* morally ambiguous, cross-dressing Clarence Hervey. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), ed. Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 2000), 614.
  62. West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2: 450. West's emphasis.
  63. Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 14, 362.
  64. The pseudonymous Sophia Sentiment echoes Wollstonecraft's claim in her complaint to the editors of *The Loiterer*: 'you have taken no more notice of us, than if you thought, like the Turks, we had no souls' (*TL*, 51). Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 84. Todd notes a 'widespread Christian misconception [in the period] that Islam denied that women had souls' (p. 383).
  65. Brunton, *Discipline*, 2: 90.
  66. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', reprinted in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 109–28, 124. See, for instance, Marilyn Butler's comment: 'Jane Austen moves turn and turn about between two plots ... built about the Heroine who is Right and the Heroine who is Wrong.' Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 166.

## 6 'Bad Morality to Conclude With'

1. Scott, 'Art. IX. *Emma; a Novel*', 200.
2. See Harris, *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*, 20–36 and 106–7. Harris points out that many of the names used in *Persuasion* are those associated with

Cook: Wallis and Carteret were fellow Captains, John Elliot journeyed on the *Resolution* with Cook, and Alexander Dalrymple was a noted cartographer for the Admiralty, to whose work Cook frequently referred. Cook's journals were widely reprinted, for example in serialised form in *The Lady's Magazine*. Sandra Adickes notes that the popularity of the 'voyage' genre was such that John Hawkesworth (author of *Almorán and Hamet*) received £6000 for the publication of an account of Cook's first voyage to the Pacific. See Adickes, *The Social Quest: The Expanded Vision of Four Women Travellers in the Era of the French Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 32.

3. See Southam, *Austen's Literary Manuscripts*, 1.
4. See, for example, Alexander Pope: 'mighty Pam, that kings and queens o'erthrew | And mowed down armies in the fights of lu'. *The Rape of the Lock: An Heroic-Comical Poem Written in the Year MDCCXII* (1712), in *Selected Poetry*, canto 3, ll. 60–4, 42.
5. Brooke, *The Excursion*, 149.
6. Brian Southam, introduction to *Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison'*, ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 17. For a detailed discussion of the importance of Richardson's novel to Austen's juvenilia, see Jocelyn Harris, 'Sir Charles Grandison in the Juvenilia', appendix to *Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, 228–38.
7. Richardson, *Grandison*, 1: 237 and 2: 38. Charles Adams's beauty leads to problems at the masquerade, when the 'Beams' that dart from his eyes are so strong that no other reveller 'dared venture within half a mile of them' – luckily the ballroom is three quarters of a mile long.
8. Richardson, *Grandison*, 2: 58, Richardson's emphasis. Austen launches another attack on this double standard in her longer story 'Evelyn', when she allows her nervous hero's wife to enjoy 'shining in that favourite character of Sir Charles Grandison's, a nurse' (MW, 186).
9. Benwick, of course, also becomes a nurse, then husband, to Louisa Musgrove. As Knox-Shaw points out, 'Benwick turns upside-down the chaste nursing of the dying Marmion by Clare in his beloved Scott, and turns back to front – inverting only the gender – the amorous nursing of Medoro by Angelica in *Orlando Furioso*, Scott's more robust source.' Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 240.
10. See Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, 188–212; Peter Knox-Shaw, 'Persuasion, Byron, and the Turkish Tale', *The Review of English Studies* 44 (1998), 47–69. See also Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 220–42. For discussions of the presence of other literature in *Persuasion*, see Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 148–9 and 159–60; Adela Pinch, 'Lost in a Book: Jane Austen's *Persuasion*', *Studies in Romanticism* 32 (1993), 97–117; Nina Auerbach, 'O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*', *ELH* 54 (1987), 893–924. See also R. W. Chapman's 'General Index of Literary Allusions', in *Persuasion*, 317–28. The most recent and best work on *Persuasion* and its relationship to the literature of the Romantic period is Harris's *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*.
11. Barbauld continues: 'the young and idle are deterred from reading him by his prolixity, and the defects of his style are become more prominent from the greater attention which has been paid to that part of composition by modern writers'. In Barbauld, 'Richardson', xlviii.
12. Barker, *Grandison's Heirs*, 147–8.

13. See, for instance, Burke's maxim: 'If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law. That convention must limit and modify all the descriptions of constitution which are formed under it.' Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 59.
14. Richardson's fiction, according to Johnson, achieves the artistic and moral end of the novel: it teaches 'the passions to move at the command of virtue'. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 97, 4: 153.
15. Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 3: 21.
16. See Harris, *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*, 110–11, 112.
17. Austen may well have taken the names Musgrove and Benwick (with slight adjustments) from the popular 'Lochinvar' stanzas of Scott's epic – the knight and his lady are pursued by 'Forsters, Fenwicks and Musgraves'. Forster she had already used in *Pride and Prejudice*. Louisa Musgrove's comment that 'We do so wish that Charles had married Anne instead' also echoes and reverses that of the female relatives gathered for the wedding in Scott's poem: 'T'were better by far | To have matched our fair cousin with bold Lochinvar.' P, 88; Scott, 'Lochinvar' (canto V:XII) from *Marmion* (1808), in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 143.
18. Interestingly, Rose's one concession to heroism is in nursing Waverley, a theme that, as we have seen, *Persuasion* revisits in depth. Maria Edgeworth (apparently misunderstanding Scott's intentions) strongly objected to Scott's deliberate romanticisation of Flora: 'There is one thing more we could wish changed or omitted in Flora's character. I have not the volume, and therefore cannot refer to the page: but I recollect in the first visit to Flora, when she is to sing certain verses, there is a walk, in which the description of the place is beautiful, but too long, and we did not like the preparation for a scene – the appearance of Flora and her harp was too like a common heroine, she should be far above all stage effect or novelist's trick.' Letter to the Author of Waverley, 23 October 1814, quoted in Maria Edgeworth et al., *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth, with a Selection from Her Letters by the Late Mrs. Edgeworth. Edited by Her Children*, 2 vols (not published, printed by Joseph Masters and Son, Aldersgate St and New Bond St, 1867), 1: 308. Original emphasis.
19. Harris, *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*, 122.
20. Wentworth's profession offers yet another criticism of Richardson, whose Grandison is as negative about the military as Sir Walter Elliot could be: 'How can a woman, proceeded he, who really loves her husband, subject herself of *choice*, to the necessary absences, to the continual apprehensions, which she must be under for his safety, when he is in the height of what is emphatically called his DUTY? He stopt. No answer being made, Perhaps, resumed he, it may be thus accounted for: Women are the most delicate part of the creation. Conscious of the weakness of their Sex, and that they stand in need of protection (for apprehensiveness, the child of prudence, is as characteristic in them, as courage in a man) they naturally love brave men – And are not all military men supposed to be brave? ... But how are they mistaken!' Richardson, *Grandison*, 1: 415.
21. Scott, 'Art. IX. *Emma; a Novel*', 200.
22. Scott is not the only author to hold this view: in *Cælebs*, More writes of novels that 'Sensibility is discarded, and with it the softness which it must be confessed belonged to it. Romance is vanished, and with it the heroic, though somewhat unnatural elevation which accompanied it. We have little to regret in the loss of either: nor have we much cause to rejoice in what we have gained by the

- exchange. A pervading and substantial selfishness, the striking characteristic of our day, is no great improvement on the wildness of the old romance, or the vapid puling of the sentimental school.' More, *Cælebs*, 2: 38.
23. For examples of the similarities of the historic Smith's legal problems with those of Austen's character see, for instance, Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 287–8.
  24. Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, 199.
  25. *Persuasion*, dir. Robert Mitchell (Siren, 1995), concludes with Anne (played by Amanda Root) and Wentworth (Ciarán Hinds) aboard a ship in full sail as the sun sets over the ocean. This follows an earlier announcement from Admiral Croft (John Woodvine) that Napoleon has escaped Elba, and 'there is to be another war'. In contrast, the recent ITV adaptation, *Persuasion*, dir. Adrian Shergold (2007), ends with Anne (Sally Hawkins) being led blindfolded to her new home – Kellynch – by Wentworth (Rupert Penry-Jones). How this homecoming is achieved is not explained, and the house's resemblance to every other Georgian residence filmed in Austen adaptations emphasises the conservatism of the film-makers' artistic decisions.
  26. Staël, *Corinne*, 246–7.
  27. Cleland, *Memoirs*, 56.
  28. Barbauld, 'Novel-Writing', 42.
  29. Staël, *Corinne*, 408, n. 28. The translator records that Staël refers here to Hugh Elliot (1752–1830), Britain's envoy at Naples in the early 1800s.
  30. Staël, *Corinne*, 196, 240, 122, 333.
  31. Staël, *Corinne*, 122, 249, 250.
  32. Julia Giordano, 'The Word as Battleground in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*', in *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*, ed. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 107–23, 109.
  33. Maria Edgeworth, Letter to Mrs Ruxton, 21 February 1818, quoted in *Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, 2: 5.
  34. Staël, *Corinne*, 358, 262.
  35. The only exception to this is Austen's 1808 elegiac poem 'To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy' (*MW*, 440–2).
  36. St Swithun was Bishop of Winchester from 852 until his death almost ten years later. Following the reinterment of his remains on 15 July 971 (St Swithun's Day), numerous miracles were attributed to him, along with the weather proverb to which Austen alludes.
  37. This is underlined in one of two surviving manuscript copies: see Jane Austen, untitled poem ('When Winchester Races first took their beginning') MS 209715 B (No. 410–12), Henry W. and Albert Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
  38. Linda Bree, 'Jane Austen's Unfinished Business: "Lady Susan", "The Watsons", "Sanditon"', paper delivered at *The Novel and its Borders*, University of Aberdeen, 9 July 2008.
  39. E. M. Forster, 'Sanditon', in *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold, 1937), 150–1.
  40. Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1925), 143–5.

## Appendix

1. See David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 432.

2. Gilson, *Bibliography*, 42, Appendix K, 431–6. See also David Gilson, 'Jane Austen's Books', in *Jane Austen: Collected Articles and Introductions* (Privately printed, 1998), 73–90.
3. H. J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 30.
4. Gilson believes Austen to have possessed, at one time or another, at least 20 books, including Bage's *Hermesprong*, Burney's *Camilla*, Goldsmith's and Hume's histories, Johnson's *Rasselas* and Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*.
5. Gilson writes: 'In the later period Jane Austen is recorded as a donor of books to members of her family. In 1801 she gave to her niece Anna a copy of *Elegant Extracts* (London: for Charles Dilly, n.d., 4<sup>o</sup>) and Ann Murray's *Mentoria: or, The young ladies instructor*, 2nd edn (London: for Charles Dilly, 1780, 8<sup>o</sup>).' He also records gifts of Cowper's *Poems* to Fanny Austen, and *The British Navigator* to James Edward Austen. Gilson, *Bibliography*, 433. She also gave books, including her own works, to her sailor brothers Frank and Charles.
6. Cassandra Elizabeth Austen, 'Last Will and Testament', 9 May 1843 (Codicil added 17 March 1845) UK Public Record Office, The National Archives, Prob 11/2015.
7. See Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Rogers, lxxx.
8. The word 'stupid' is in a hand similar to Austen's, but 'foolish' and the illegible word that follows it do not resemble Austen's customarily neat script. See also Mary Brunton, *Self-Control: A Novel*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: George Ramsay & Co., 1811), 2: 203 and 231, BRU 1 1711, in Chawton House Library, Knight Collection.

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